

Friends and Foes

by Nevermore

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Friends and Foes

> <meta name="Generator"> Julian sat at the head of the conclave table, looking intently at the primogen that had gathered here

Spelling Television, Inc. (a subsidiary of Spelling Entertainment group, Inc) owns the characters of Julian, Cameron, Daedalus, Lillie, Sasha, Cash, Caitlin Byrne, Frank Kohaneck, Eddie Fiori, Sonny, and any others from the Kindred: The Embraced TV show that I may have forgotten to mention. Vampire: The Masquerade is owned by White Wolf Publishing. My use is in no way meant to challenge their copyrights.

The character of Matt Reimer springs from the mind of Eric Bowmaster.

All of the other characters, as well as the story, are mine.

I include this small little warning for the benefit of anyone who considers himself to be an overly sensitive person. There is violence presented in this story, sometimes graphically, and there are a couple of nasty words. If you have a problem with this, don't read it, and don't tell me later that you found it offensive because forewarned is forearmed. I would probably rate this story PG-13, perhaps R (but I doubt it). Who knows? I don't get paid to come up with actual ratings, so I really don't care all that much. I think I can safely say that this is the tamest of the stories to have burst forth from my sometimes overactive imagination. Enjoy.

Additional special thanks go to Icy Mike Molson, who helped point out the glaring errors and deficiencies in the story, and who also put me in a position to create some of these characters and to have some

created by the other people mentioned above. I would also be remiss in not mentioning Dwayne Gamble, without whose guidance this fairly decent final draft would not have been possible, although I must admit that I am still confused by some of his suggestions.

Author's Note: This story is the second in a series of five. Although this story stands well on its own, it follows a several story arc, and it is recommended that you read "Blood Under a Full Moon" before you read this.

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FRIENDS AND FOES

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by

Nevermore

CHAPTER 1

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I

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Julian sat at the head of the conclave table, looking intently at the primogen that had gathered before him. They had all endured so much recently, from the overthrow of Eddie Fiori, the old Brujah primogen, to the Brujah war that followed, to the recent garou invasion. The number of kindred in the city had been at its lowest level in decades following the war with the lupines, but in the three months following that disaster the ranks had begun to slowly fill. Cameron could be said to once again be in control of a clan, as the Brujah now numbered nine, with two other prospective members already chosen to be embraced when there was time enough to initiate them. Not surprisingly, the Gangrel had kept pace with the Brujah. The Toreador had added one new member with Lillie's latest childe, Travis, and even clan Telemon had increased its number by one when Matt sired his first childe. The new Telemon, Holden, was a recently retired Navy SEAL.

The animosity between the clans had also begun to fade away, as they had all been able to work together in the fight against the garou. There was also the fact that many of the kindred were newly embraced, sired within the last few months. They had not yet had time to learn the hatreds of their predecessors, and to be fully affected by the vampiric blood that flowed within their bodies. There was promise for a brighter future, if they could only keep an air of respectability for a short while longer.

Across from Julian, Cameron reflected on many of the same issues. He saw how far his clan had come within the previous few months. Before the garou had attacked, the Brujah were considered the lowest scum in the city. They received respect from no one as they flaunted the laws of the society in which they lived, and endangered the Masquerade with their constant pursuit of the control of the city. However, when the city had been threatened, they had defended it with the others.

Many Brujah died the final death alongside the Gangrel, the clan that they hated most.

Cameron knew well enough how important respect was in the city. If he were ever to gain control of the conclave and sit as prince, he would have to demonstrate further the newfound responsibility of the Brujah clan. It was true enough that many of their new acquisitions had the same independent streak as those that they replaced, but they were thus far nowhere near as violent. _Some of them actually have a brain_, Cameron thought, as he reflected on the two progeny that Rayce had chosen. Rayce had selected a police psychiatrist that had once been a SWAT team member until a heart defect was discovered, preventing him from meeting physical requirements. That, of course, was no longer a problem. Dr. Mitchell Carter was now the epitome of what some of the whispered stories said that the Brujah had once been â€" the scholarly warrior. Cameron was less impressed by Rayce's other childe, however. He was a simple historian at the University of California. Rayce had been wise though, realizing as Cameron did the need to gain respectability. He knew it was not advisable to exclusively embrace anarchistic punks.

Only two Brujah could now be considered true street criminals. Cameron had embraced Rica knowing that she had lived on the streets for years, but he had wanted to maintain some of the connections that the Brujah had always enjoyed. She had, in turn, embraced Bottle Rocket, her mortal lover. Unfortunately, she had done so without the permission of the prince or her primogen. If there had not been a need to repopulate the city, they would both have been extinguished, but lately Julian seemed to feel more mellow toward the Brujah. Perhaps, Cameron thought, they were indeed gaining his trust. If that were accomplished, gaining the confidence of the other clans would almost certainly follow. Of course, the Gangrel would never fall into line, but Cameron knew he needed only the support of a majority of the clans to hold the city. Cash had but one vote on the conclave.

He looked at Cash, wondering what the Gangrel was thinking. Cash simply stared up to the head of the table, where Matt sat next to Julian, his large body an impressive reminder that clan Telemon was now responsible for the safety of the prince. The city's kindred had all learned very quickly the effectiveness of the Telemon in combat, and there were none in this room who would consider challenging the prince's bodyguard. Though Cash was glad to be able to devote all of his time to his clan, he was also aware of the status he had given up by allowing Matt to take over security. Cash had once been at Julian's side at every moment, there to hear every deal and promise as it was made. He was there to see Cameron when he would come to Julian, begging forgiveness for his latest mistake. It was a position that he greatly missed.

However, the Gangrel clan had begun to re-grow. Cash had embraced three childer, and one of them, Theo, had shown so much promise that Julian had actually allowed the neonate to create his own brood. The wandering gypsy had embraced four of his friends from his mortal life, and they had set up shop in San Francisco. Although a somewhat insular sect of the Gangrel, they were nonetheless loyal to Cash and their clan. The Gangrel were again as strong as they may have ever been, their smaller numbers being made up for by a loyalty even greater than there had been in the days of Stevie Ray. The unthinkable was occurring â€" the growth of a sedentary, close-knit

Gangrel clan.

"I think we should get all of the matters out of the way as quickly as possible," Julian said, bringing everyone out of their respective reveries. "We all know the reason for this meeting, but before we get to the issue of the anarchs, I think we should simply make sure there are no other matters to be considered."

The anarchs were generally the newest of the kindred, most often clanless, or Caitiff, as the Camarilla referred to them. It was against the Camarilla that the anarchs were rebelling, often refusing to obey the Traditions set forth by their elders. The Traditions that were ignored included, much to Julian's ire, the Masquerade. The anarchs often resembled street gangs, carving out their own territory in a prince's city, and were an almost unavoidable problem in any major urban center, though Julian had always been lucky. The Brujah and the Gangrel, so often at each other's throats for control of the streets, tolerated the entry of no other force in the unseen quarters of San Francisco. They would always call a brief peace to destroy any interlopers on their respective turfs, but recently neither clan was in any position to conduct a small-scale war.

The lack of strength of the Gangrel and Brujah put Julian in a rather precarious position. All across California, the Camarilla prices had fallen in the face of onslaughts from the anarch gangs. Los Angeles had been the first to fall, followed quickly by every other major city on the West Coast except for San Francisco. A few years earlier, Cyrus, Eddie Fiori's sire, had gained control of Los Angeles and declared himself prince, displacing the disordered rule of the anarchs. Lately though, it seemed as if the uprising anarchs may indeed succeed in once again deposing a prince of Los Angeles. Julian was understandably concerned about his city being the next to fall to this almost irresistible tide.

"Yes, I have one request," Matt stated flatly, addressing what he felt to be an important point arising from the anarch problem. "However, as it is an issue related to the anarchs, it might be better to wait until we've covered the other matter."

"What exactly is it, so we could keep it in mind?" Julian asked. He had an uneasy feeling that he knew exactly what Matt would want, but he hoped he was wrong.

"Clan Telemon wishes to offer you the service of disposing of the anarchs, though we'll need better weapons," Matt stated evenly. "We wish to ask for an end to the weapons ban." Matt referred to Julian's ban on the importing of new weapons to add to clan arsenals, in addition to a prohibition on heavy weapons. No explosives were to be used by any kindred, and this included grenades and C-4, two staples of Telemon firepower.

"Out of the question," Julian responded, having had his suspicions confirmed. "I am appreciative of the offer, but there will be no more mass-destruction in this city. It endangers the Masquerade. Are there any other matters?" As no one responded, he continued with the problem that had brought them all to the meeting that night. "Two anarch gangs have recently settled within San Francisco. Although unrelated and not allied, they appear to be on speaking terms with one another. What are everyone's thoughts on the matter?"

"My contacts tell me that they have an agreement to leave each other alone, so we can't rely on them killing each other off," Daedalus said, obviously disappointed. Although anarchs were often looked upon as an organized force that moved against the prince of the city, Daedalus knew that in actuality the anarchs were often as factionalized as the clans of the Camarilla. It was not unusual for them to fight each other over the right to be the gang to actually receive the honor of overthrowing a prince. "Both gangs are well-armed, and battle against them would endanger the Masquerade," Daedalus added. "We must also keep in mind our present situation."

"We have no real soldiers," Lillie added. "Those of us at this table, plus Rayce and Sasha, are the only ones to have seen battle. How many of these anarchs are there?"

"There are eight of The Brotherhood," Cash said, naming one of the gangs. "They've taken over the Mission District, and have been scuffling with a few of my clan." The Gangrel primogen looked rather irked by the last piece of information. Cash was known to be very protective of the safety of his childer, which all constituted the bulk of the clan in San Francisco.

"The Sons of Cronus have at least a dozen, maybe more" Cameron added, referring to the second anarch gang. "They've been messing with my clan, getting in the way of our racketeering businesses. They've become effective competitors, Julian. The Brujah demand the right to destroy these trespassers. We join Matt in requesting that the weapons ban be lifted. We need better weapons than what we already have."

"There are over a dozen of them?" Lillie asked, obviously surprised.

"Yes, they're apparently claiming to be a new bloodline, though they don't say where from," Cameron replied, casting a quick glance in Matt's direction. All of the primogen knew that the Telemon claimed to be a distinct bloodline that sprang from the Brujah clan. They also knew that Cameron was particularly displeased with the situation, as he had little tolerance for those that tried to claim independence from the Camarilla's clan system, especially when it affected his ability to control the Brujah. If every Brujah in the city claimed to be of a distinct bloodline, Cameron's authority would be quickly and irrevocably destroyed.

"Probably Brujah," Daedalus suggested, echoing the thoughts of everyone at the table. "They seem to be developing the same tastes in amusement as your clan is known for," he added, directing his comment toward Cameron. In addition to the same criminal tendencies, it was common knowledge that the bulk of the anarchs in California had all been Brujah, and were rising against the Camarilla elders who would be their masters. Daedalus simply had enough tact to avoid pointing out this well-known fact any more bluntly than he already had.

"Tastes in amusement my clan **was** known for," Cameron corrected. "We've come a long way." Daedalus simply shrugged in response. "What about the weapons ban, Julian?" Cameron asked, continuing to press the subject.

"I have already answered that question, Cameron," Julian answered coolly. "I don't see the need to repeat myself."

"Julian, we have to protect our position in the city," Cash said, almost pleading. "You can't expect us to just sit idly by and watch them take over our turf."

"We will persuade them that it's in their best interests to leave," Julian answered. "There will be no violent confrontations."

"Then how do we persuade them?" Cash asked. "These bastards only seem to be willing to listen to force. They've shot up a couple of my Gangrel pretty badly already." Even as he spoke, Cash was almost shocked at the fact that his voice joined that of Cameron, but he shoved aside the uncomfortable feeling it caused in him.

"We own the police and the papers," Julian responded flatly. "We can force them out without taking direct action. It is the advantage we derive from being established."

"I agree," Daedalus said. "The peace must be maintained in order to support the masquerade. That is all-important."

"Lillie?" Julian asked. "How do you vote?"

Lillie looked around the table, trying to judge the way this was all going. The Brujah and Gangrel had actually agreed on something for once, and wanted more war. Telemon would probably support them. The Nosferatu, predictably enough, were seeking peace, so as to better conceal themselves from the persecution of the mortals. Julian spoke for the Ventrue in supporting the notion of peace through persuasion. "The Toreador remind everyone that the expression of beauty is in our best interests. There is no beauty in slaughter, and tourists don't come to the city to see a gang war. The peace should be protected."

"Clan Telemon?" Julian asked, knowing that in all likelihood there would be a tie vote, which would mean further deliberation.

"Clan Telemon supports the prince," Matt said. Cash and Cameron looked at him in disbelief, feeling they had had an ally on this issue. "With one condition," Matt added.

"What?" Julian asked suspiciously.

"If the time should come that action is needed, clan Telemon requests that the arms ban be lifted, so that we may increase our stores of weapons, and make use of some of our more effective ordnance." Matt made his demand without any visible emotion, but was ecstatic inside. He was confident Julian would give in to his request. However, from the looks of the primogen at the table, he had achieved something far more significant than the right to acquire new weapons. He had received their respect for being as cunning an individual in the politics of the conclave as he was on the battlefields of the kindred world. He hoped that impression would stay with them.

Julian simply looked at Matt for a moment, deep in thought. "Agreed," Julian said. He knew that it was important to get this vote to turn his way, and hoped that his plan of peace would succeed. If the debate were allowed to continue, he risked having Lillie go over to

the other side, which was not an unforeseeable occurrence. She always did love a good fight. "I believe that ends our business, then," Julian said. "I trust you all to keep our decision in mind."

The primogen all left the room quickly, and Cameron sought out Cash as soon as they were out in the hall. Without a word he grabbed the Gangrel's hand and slipped a piece of paper in it. Cash looked up at Cameron in surprise, but the Brujah had already managed to turn his back to the Gangrel and precede him out the door of Julian's mansion. Once outside, Cash looked down at the note he had been passed, reading the message quickly, "Meet me at Pierce Street Annex, 3138 Fillmore, ASAP."

Cash pondered the meaning of the note. It almost seemed as if Cameron was looking to make some kind of plan with the Gangrel at a secret meeting. Cash's Gangrel blood and learned response to a Brujah offer for a deal immediately caused him to suspect that there was a trap being prepared for him. Still, his curiosity had been piqued, and he had to know what it was that Cameron wanted. He got onto his bike and started it up, so intent on his thoughts that he did not even notice Sasha running out through the front door to talk to him. Cash took off down the drive and headed toward his meeting with Cameron, who had left only a few minutes earlier.

II

As Cash approached the door to the Pierce Street Annex, he let out an audible moan. The line was at least twenty people long, and there was no telling how long he would have to wait to get inside. He went to the back of the line, impatiently shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

"You're a little out of you element here, aren't you?" a woman asked Cash as she grabbed his arm. In reaction he grabbed her and started to draw his Glock, but stopped his motion when he realized that the woman was Daria, Cameron's newest grandchilde. Mark, who thus far appeared to be Cameron's favorite of his latest acquisitions, had embraced her. Daria typified the image of what the Brujah seemed to be looking for in their latest childer. She was neat, well dressed, but seemed to have an edge to her personality that Cash could not quite place. Something in her eyes was patently Brujah, though she almost dressed like the martini drinking, stylish young crowd that made up the patronage of this particular establishment. It occurred to Cash that the Pierce Street Annex seemed more like a Ventrue recruiting center than the latest Brujah stomping ground.

"I'm here to see Cameron," Cash replied.

"Well I figured you weren't here to socialize," Daria responded, looking him up and down. "At least not dressed like that," she added, obviously disappointed in the Gangrel's lack of fashion sense. "Come on." She grabbed his arm and pulled him to the front of the line, shaking her head at Cash's blue jeans and white T-shirt ensemble, accompanied as always by the black leather biker jacket. "Rick, this is Cash," she said quickly, introducing the Gangrel primogen to the bouncer working the door. "He's a friend of the boss, and I don't think you should have him waiting in line," Daria added with a large smile. He only responded by waving them past, much to the

dissatisfaction of those left outside in the cool night.

As Cash walked in, he had to admit that the place was everything he thought it would be. One look at the clientele and he could quickly guess why this was one of the most infamous clubs in the so-called "Triangle." The Triangle was an area of San Francisco so called due to the uncanny tendency for people to disappear for the night with new friends. This was certainly one of the hook-up capitals of the world.

It was obvious why the Brujah had been so intent on purchasing the club. They had been desperately searching for a way to increase standing within kindred society, and a legitimate business interest with the reputation of the Pierce Street Annex was an excellent start. Besides that, however, the intense mingling of singles created an outstanding hunting ground for the entire clan.

Daria continued to lead Cash through the throng, proceeding to a door at the back of the floor, and then through to a dimly lit hallway beyond. The back rooms that Cameron used for business had been soundproofed rather effectively, and Cash was finally able to start recovering from the assault on his heightened senses that he had endured from the loud music within the club. After the short hallway, the two kindred reached another door, and Daria knocked loudly.

"Come in," Cameron called from inside, and the two entered a well-furnished office. Cameron was seated behind an ornate mahogany desk, sharply dressed in a pin-stripe power suit. He motioned for Cash and Daria to sit, and then began. "You're probably wondering why I asked you here," Cameron said as he leaned back in his black leather chair.

"The thought crossed my mind," Cash answered smugly. A large part of Cash's being begged for Cameron to try to attack him, so that he would have an excuse to rip out the Brujah's heart. These were apparently different times, though, he reminded himself. He would have to be patient and see what happened, not necessarily expecting what he felt was the inevitable attack.

"Let me make this short and sweet then," Cameron responded, his characteristic arrogance showing through in his tone. "The Brujah have rarely agreed with Julian's way of running the city, and this situation with the anarchists is no exception."

"You're going to try to cut Julian out of power over this?" Cash asked in an extremely accusatory tone. "My clan remains loyal to Julian, you won't get me to join you."

"Ah, the shortsightedness of youth," Cameron returned, smiling widely as he leaned forward again and folded his hands on the desk. "The Brujah are loyal to our prince as well, at least for now. We both know that only Julian's reputation for brutality when pushed too far is what keeps the damned anarchist masses from making a play for San Francisco right now. We've never been this vulnerable before, though. As far as I'm concerned, better the devil I know than the devil I don't. Let's just forego any of our traditional banter, though, shall we? That's not what's important right now."

"And what is?" Cash asked, getting more and more impatient. He

noticed, however, that Daria was still behaving extremely well. She had not said a word since they had come in, which Cash thought was quite odd for a Brujah. Most would have tried to butt in by now. She was different, though. Like many other Brujah, she had been a criminal, seeing the inside of a jail cell at the age of only sixteen. Rather than violent crime, though, she had been a hacker. She had apparently broken into a few corporate systems and sold company secrets to the highest bidder. Intelligent, ambitious, and completely devoid of respect for the law, the new generation of Brujah was far more dangerous than those that had come before. Cash made it a point to keep that fact in mind as he listened to Cameron continue.

"What is important is that the anarchs be dealt with," Cameron answered.

"Julian has already ruled on this," Cash replied as he sat back, deciding he might be more effective by seeming completely comfortable in the situation. "He's going to try to persuade them to leave."

"You said yourself at the meeting that the only way to persuade them would be to extinguish a few," Cameron pointed out. "I'm simply offering the opportunity to do that."

"How?" Cash asked, suddenly more interested. While he did not like the idea of acting against the prince's orders, the fact remained that Julian was really not aware of what the situation was like. The prince sat up in his mansion, not having to deal with life on the streets. Cash knew that struggle, and refused to let his clan get shot up anymore if it could be avoided.

"An alliance between the Brujah and the Gangrel," Cameron said in reply.

"What?" Cash asked in complete disbelief. True, things were a little different lately, but this went beyond anything he had ever contemplated. The only Brujah he had even been able to talk to was Sasha, and even that got difficult at times.

"It makes sense," Cameron replied matter-of-factly, gazing at the Gangrel primogen, trying to judge Cash's response to the suggestion. So far it seemed favorable. After all, the young Gangrel had not yet tried to rip out his heart. "The Brotherhood is challenging you on your turf, and The Sons of Cronus are meddling in our business interests. If we each attacked our opponent, we'd suffer heavy losses. There are too few of us right now to accept that situation. If we both unite against each faction, though, we could wipe them out fairly effectively. Losses would be decreased because of the advantage in numbers that we would gain. Besides, our newest childer are going to have to fight eventually, we might as well get them some experience now, when it's not a life and death situation like it was a few months ago." The mention of the garou attack on the city seemed to have the effect on Cash that Cameron had desired. The Gangrel seemed to take the whole conversation far more seriously.

"It sounds reasonable," Cash reluctantly admitted, "but I want to know what else you're getting out of this. I don't believe that a few anarchs are enough to get you to want to work with my clan."

"Don't get me wrong, Cash," Cameron answered. "This doesn't mean I like you any more than I ever have. I still think the Gangrel are a filthy bunch of gypsy criminals, but we have a common enemy, and I'm willing to put differences aside for now." Cameron smiled as he finished, completely oblivious to the extent to which he had offended his Gangrel guest. In his own mind, the Brujah primogen was being remarkably magnanimous.

"Watch it, Cameron, or this alliance dies right along with you," the Gangrel responded, letting Cameron know how far he had been pushed. Cash glared at the Brujah sitting across from him, whose only response was to form his thin smile into a broad, smug grin.

"Besides," Cameron added, "the Gangrel hold a position of some respect with the prince. If we were to work with you, even against the prince's orders, it would make the Brujah look better. Image is everything nowadays, you know."

"Especially when you're aiming to be the next prince," Cash shot back. Cameron simply shrugged his shoulders in response, not even seeing the point in denying what both men knew well to be true. "What exactly did you have in mind, Cameron?"

"I'm having weapons shipped in tonight," Cameron replied, not seeing too much harm in letting Cash get the gist of the plan. He would wait on revealing locations, however. "Rayce will meet the seller, since it's his contact. He'll have Carter along with him, and I'm also sending Daria here along to help with security. I want you to send some of your Gangrel to watch the perimeter, making sure none of Julian's sources finds out what we're up to."

"You mean the Nosferatu," Cash said. The sewer dwellers were known to be the greatest sources of information in the city. They knew everything that happened, and things like this always had a way of finding their way back to the prince.

"Absolutely," Cameron replied with a hint of disgust. The Brujah had never been on the best of terms with the Nosferatu. "The Gangrel have a knowledge of the streets that the new Brujah do not. You'd be able to pick the damn sewer rats out far sooner than we ever could. Once we have the weapons, we'll give everyone a crash course in using them correctly, and within a week we should be able to go on the offensive. When we have the interlopers out of the way, we can go back to the way things were."

"Back at each other's throats," Cash finished for him. He had to admit the idea had some appeal to him.

"No," Cameron replied, surprising the Gangrel yet again. "I'm pulling the Brujah back off the streets for the most part. Rica and Bottle Rocket have their own little brood of ghouls, but they're the only ones we have doing the old Brujah punk thing. The streets are yours, as long as you stay out of Rica's way. She's already been given similar instructions to stay clear of you."

"You're letting us have the streets?" Cash asked in disbelief. The control of San Francisco's streets had always been hotly contested, as no small part of the drug trade went along with it. That had always been a large source of the Brujah's income. The thought that

they were surrendering their claim was unthinkable.

"We've moved on," Cameron answered, trying to sound as civilized as he could. "If you want to live in the streets, go ahead. We've decided to live in apartments and homes. Our businesses are diversifying."

"So you're becoming Ventrue," Cash said. For the first time since arriving, he provoked an instant display of emotion from his host.

"Absolutely not," Cameron spat. "The damned Ventrue build up wealth for wealth's sake. It's a game with no purpose for them. We have a purpose to our business interests, and we also have loyalty to other members of our clan. We are nothing like the Ventrue."

Cameron's words made Cash uneasy. The thought of the Brujah getting organized enough to work toward a distant goal was something he had never seen, and it was unsettling. After the garou had decimated the ranks of the Brujah, Rayce had told Cash that the clan would change with its new acquisitions. He had promised that things would be different between the two clans in the future, but Cash had been dubious. Suddenly, however, he was nervous. Perhaps the peace that had initially followed the battle was just a sign of a greater level of consciousness for the Brujah. To have brains behind the brawn of the Brujah clan was perhaps the greatest threat to the Gangrel, and Julian's position as prince, that he had ever contemplated.

"I apologize," Cash said, deciding that for the time being it might be better to swallow his pride. He had never apologized to any Brujah except Sasha, but he got the feeling that he would be doing it more often. For now, though, the threat of the anarchs remained, and an alliance with the Brujah was a solution. He could worry about dealing with their new philosophies later. "When are the weapons coming in?" Cash asked, his question indicating that he wanted to be a part of the scheme.

"Three a.m. down at the Presidio," Cameron replied, trusting the Gangrel primogen despite himself. "Rayce is outside in the club somewhere. Find him, he'll give you the specifics." Cameron opened an accounting ledger, and began reading, clearly signaling that the meeting had ended. Daria stood up, and led Cash back out through the hallway to the club.

"Have fun," she said, smiling, apparently aware of how uncomfortable the masses of people made the reclusive Gangrel. With that she walked off, leaving Cash to find Rayce on his own.

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III

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Julian sat with Caitlin at the Haven, allowing himself to relax in her company. While it was true that he had gone there for business, he was certain that the conversation would eventually swing toward more pleasurable pursuits. He watched her smile as she pulled out a file holding the information about her latest story. She and one of her reporters were investigating the rise of gang-related violence

within the city. Her fear was that San Francisco would eventually become like LA, and she desperately hoped that by bringing attention to the problem, she could persuade the authorities to take action before things got out of control. Her idealism amused Julian, who could not hide his smile as she spoke. Finally, she looked up and noticed him.

"Why are you laughing at me?" she asked.

"I'm not laughing, I'm only smiling," Julian responded, growing even more amused.

"So what's so funny?" Caitlin asked, seeming increasingly offended with every passing second.

"Nothing," Julian answered smoothly, leaning back in the booth as he looked her over. "Your idealism is just rather unique in this world."

"Is that good or bad?" Caitlin questioned as she finally allowed a smile to come to her face.

"That's very good," Julian said. "So what exactly can you sum all this research up as?"

"Bottom line?" Caitlin asked, already knowing that Julian was always interested only in the bottom line.

"Yes," Julian replied, his smile slowly vanishing as he prepared to get serious about business.

"Well," Caitlin said with a sigh, "I think there are two gangs in the city, one seems to have claimed a turf in the Mission District, and the other seems to be holding North Beach and Chinatown. They're not fighting each other, but there were apparently some gangs there before, and they've been displaced."

Displaced, Julian thought. That would have been the Gangrel, who suffered no small number of gunshot wounds in trying to protect their territory. Due to their small numbers and lack of fighting experience, it had actually been amazing that none of them were killed. "Do you know any specifics about the gangs?" Julian asked.

"Not too much," Caitlin replied, obviously disappointed. "We only found out a little about the one in the Mission District. They call themselves The Brotherhood of the Holy Fist, and seem to have some kind of philosophical dogma that they adhere to. I've never heard of anything like it."

"What kind of philosophy?" Julian asked curiously.

"They believe themselves to be immune to the bullets of their enemies, as long as they have faith in the righteousness of their existence, or something like that." Caitlin shrugged her shoulders, indicating that she did not really have all the facts that she would like to gather before running the story.

"Sounds like the Boxer Rebellion in China," Julian muttered under his breath.

"What?" Caitlin asked.

"A revolution against western imperialism in China about a hundred years ago," Julian responded, thinking back to the stories he had read in the papers when he had been much younger. "The revolutionaries believed themselves to be immune to bullets fired by westerners. Needless to say, the revolution failed."

"You know a little bit about everything, don't you?" Caitlin asked as she sipped some of the wine that she always enjoyed at the club.

"It comes from experience," Julian replied.

"I bet," Caitlin answered with a thin smile. She gazed into Julian's eyes, only to realize that he was not focusing on her. He was looking past her, toward the stairs descending into the club. She turned and looked to see what had grabbed Julian's attention, and saw three men standing a few stairs from the floor, surveying the room. Out of the corner of her eye she could see Matt, Julian's bodyguard, move from the bar toward their table, his finger deftly undoing the safety on the weapon he kept only partially hidden under his jacket.

Julian looked the three men over intently. Four steps off the floor stood a moderately sized man, wearing a black silk suit and shirt, covered by a black wool trenchcoat. On his head he wore a black top hat, and his hand held a gnarled wooden cane with a baseball-sized emerald set in the top. As the man took off his hat, Julian noticed that his hair was short-cropped and slicked back. The man seemed to stand with a confident demeanor, almost basking in the attention he was drawing from people in the room. One step below him, standing to his left and right, stood the other two. They each wore black Armani suits and black trenchcoats. The one on the right wore a black fedora, and was smoking a large cigar. All three looked the room over with an obvious combination of indifference and disdain.

Julian looked over to Matt and motioned for him to be alert, but to not interfere with the men. The three descended off of the stairs, the man holding the top hat advancing first, flanked by the other two. As the three crossed the room, every eye in the place turned to them. Caitlin felt increasingly uneasy as the three approached, but fought back the feeling as well as she could. As a reporter on the streets, she had learned how to deal with uncomfortable situations. All three seemed to strut, as if nothing in the world could touch them. Most likely, Caitlin thought, little could. She had seen men like this before, men who seemed to exist on a level above most of those around them. Men who were generally ruthless and took anything they pleased. Men like Julian, she thought to herself.

They slowed as they approached Julian's table, and the lead man allowed a thin smile to cross his lips. "You are Julian Luna?" he asked, his demeanor indicating that he already knew full well who he was addressing.

"Yes," Julian replied. He then turned to Caitlin, who seemed increasingly interested in the newcomers. "Caitlin, could you please give us a moment alone?" Julian asked, trying to keep his voice tender as he hoped to avoid insulting her by asking her to leave. "We have a few matters to discuss." Caitlin looked at Julian rather indignantly, but nonetheless stood up and walked over to the bar,

avoiding making any eye contact with Matt as she walked past him. While she was somewhat offended at being dismissed like some servant, she had to admit that she breathed more easily with every step she put between herself and the men who were visiting her employer.

The man allowed his smile to broaden, revealing his amusement at the truth to the rumor that the prince had a mortal lover. "My name is Robert Boccaccio," the man holding the top hat said. "I present myself for entrance into your city." The name sent a cold shiver down Julian's spine. He had heard of this kindred. Boccaccio was a Tremere, the clan of vampires said to have descended from a coven of human necromancers. They were generally untrusted and feared by the other clans, though they were in fact one of the seven founding clans of the Camarilla. From what Julian knew, Boccaccio was in charge of establishing Tremere presence in cities in the western United States. He commonly stayed in a city for a couple of years, and then left a subordinate to look after the clan's affairs when he moved on to the next city in which they wished to establish residence. It was likely, Julian thought, that one of the men with Boccaccio would become primogen of the Tremere when the elder left.

"I have heard of you," Julian responded flatly.

"Oh really?" Boccaccio responded, doing a poor job of feigning surprise. The old Tremere knew well that the prince of every major city west of the Mississippi knew his name, as well as what his presence in a city meant for the status quo. "I am truly flattered."

"What about your friends?" Julian asked, gesturing to Boccaccio's companions.

"This is Solomon Fisk," Boccaccio replied, gesturing to the man with the fedora, smoking the cigar. "He is my childe. Our companion is Patrick Collins. He is Solomon's childe. We have come to establish a chantry for the Tremere clan in San Francisco. We would, therefore, be planning to stay for an extended period of time. We request your leave to establish residence within your city."

The request would ordinarily have been granted without Julian even needing to ponder it for more than half a second, especially under the present circumstances. They needed all the kindred they could get. The Tremere, though, operated by rules that were not understood by outsiders. They were commonly called warlocks, and were widely known to employ a form of blood magic referred to as Thaumaturgy, which allowed them to manifest magical results through the manipulation of their vampire blood. The motives of the Tremere were always questionable, but it was beyond dispute that they had always been loyal to the Camarilla. They could be trusted to be discreet, and thus the Masquerade was in no danger from these newcomers, and they would most probably adhere to any edicts that Julian handed down as the prince. However, they could also be depended upon to bend and push the rules as far as possible, so they would bear close watching.

"Of course you may enter the city," Julian said without any noticeable hesitation. "I trust you to follow kindred law. Choose a primogen and have him come to my mansion tomorrow night at eleven, at which time there will be a presentation to the other primogen in the city."

"What other clans are represented in San Francisco?" Boccaccio asked. The question seemed absurd to Julian, as he was sure that the Tremere would have analyzed the situation before they decided to send in anyone. He was confident that they knew not only what clans were in the city, but who the primogen were and how many kindred there were of each clan. However, in order to be gracious, Julian answered the question.

"On the conclave we have representatives of the Nosferatu, Toreador, Gangrel, Brujah, Telemon, and of course myself, the Ventrue." Boccaccio nodded as Julian ran off the names, and then turned to leave. The prince noted the fact that Boccaccio did not ask about the Telemon, a clan that had no representation in the United States outside of a couple of small eastern cities. This confirmed any suspicion he had that the Tremere had researched the situation very carefully.

"I will see you tomorrow night then, Mr. Luna," Boccaccio replied, knowing full well that Julian would have seized upon the fact that he had not asked about the Telemon. One of his goals had been to make the prince feel as if he were more perceptive than he actually was. Having accomplished everything that he had set out to do in his introduction, the Tremere gave a slight bow, followed by a nod from Fisk and Collins, and then the three walked out.

As soon as they were out of view, Matt joined Julian at the table. "I always wondered why the Tremere wouldn't have ever paid attention to San Francisco," the Telemon said. "I guess they started to wonder, too."

"They want my city," Julian said. "I could see it in Boccaccio's eyes. They know the situation, and they came to force me out."

"Julian, what are the chances of that ever happening?" Matt asked. "The clans are all loyal to you, and to be prince the Tremere would have to get the consent of the primogen. I don't think any of them would consider turning their backs on you, not even the Brujah. Especially not to follow the Tremere. It might look like you're weakened, but I think the situation has brought us all closer, and that will pose too great a problem for the Tremere."

"Perhaps," Julian responded.

As the two spoke, they did not notice Sasha and Cash come in, arm in arm. They walked over to a table in the corner and watched over the people around them for a few minutes, picking out possible prey for later on in the evening.

"Is everything really as good as it seems, Cash?" Sasha asked, finally breaking the silence.

"What do you mean?" the Gangrel asked in return, disregarding the patrons in favor of fixing his attention on Sasha.

"Ever since the massacre, the Brujah and Gangrel haven't been as much against us spending time together," Sasha pointed out, revealing her reason for her good mood.

"It's because all the kindred that hated us being together are dead," Cash said, reminding himself again of the many friends he had lost while fighting the garou. Once again he felt the pain of not having been able to die alongside them, but he had been required to defend the prince instead. He pushed the guilt of survival from his mind as he looked at Sasha and smiled. "Rebuilding the clans gives us a chance to change certain things," Cash said, deftly hiding the melancholy that had appeared in his mind when he had thought of his lost clanmates. "The new Gangrel don't have all the hatred toward the Brujah that the older Gangrel had. There still is the dislike in the blood, but the constant anti-Brujah propaganda doesn't exist anymore. From what I've seen, the Brujah are pretty much the same way."

"Yeah," Sasha said with a smile. "Rayce has been going at it with Cameron on a daily basis, trying to get him to change the clan's tastes in progeny. He gets Cameron to listen, though, because they both want the clan to improve, and the old ways certainly didn't work."

"You can't argue that," Cash agreed. He looked at Sasha for a few more moments, pondering just how much he should expose his suspicions about the Brujah leadership, and decided he had to know a little more. "Sasha, what are the two of them up to?" Cash asked, unable to hide his suspicions as well as he had concealed his sorrow just moments before.

"What do you mean?" Sasha asked, clearly surprised.

"They're getting organized, Sasha, it's not like the Brujah to do that," Cash explained. "It's not in the blood, you should know that. How do you feel about them creating an ordered hierarchy?"

"I don't know," Sasha answered. "All I know is that nowadays I've been able to spend time with you without everyone around us getting ready to rip our heads off."

"It's a nice change," Cash agreed. He looked right at her, and then pulled her chair over to his. Just as he went to embrace her, though, Cash caught sight of Matt approaching from Julian's table.

"Cash," Matt said, "Julian needs a favor from you." The bodyguard then turned and walked back to Julian's table, waiting with the prince for Cash to come over and talk.

"Sorry, duty calls," Cash said to Sasha. "Where are you going to be later?"

"I'm probably gonna go back home," Sasha answered. "Not as much opportunity to do Brujah stuff nowadays."

"Ok, I'll see you later then." Cash got up and went over to Julian. Cash was always willing to do any favor that the prince wanted of him, as it helped him feel as if he was not forgotten, despite the fact that he was no longer a constant presence. When Cash arrived at Julian's table, the prince wasted no time in getting to the point.

"Cash, there are three Tremere who just came into town, I need you to find out where they're staying," Julian stated, the urgency clear in

his voice.

"Tremere?" Cash asked. It had been over twenty years since he had run into a Tremere, and that had been when he was in San Diego. He had never heard of any member of the clan setting foot in San Francisco. Some had said that they had made a deal with Archon to stay out of the city, while others said they had no interest in the Bay Area, as absurd an idea as that was. Whatever had kept the Tremere out of the city was apparently gone, though, since they had finally arrived.

"It's important, Cash," Julian said. "You aren't doing anything tonight, are you?"

"No," Cash replied. He thought of the weapons delivery, but he knew he could entrust that duty to Theo and his brood. That would leave him free to search the city with Jake, Lana, and T.J.

"Then get going, and let me know as soon as you hear anything," Julian ordered. Cash immediately got up and bolted up the steps, happy he was still considered a reliable person by the prince. He already felt himself regaining some of the prestige he had felt he lost when Matt had taken over security at the mansion.

As Cash ran out, he saw Rayce approaching the club. He walked up to him quickly, and appraised him of the situation. "I'll be sending Theo down to the meeting later," he said. "I have to do something for Julian."

"What's up?" Rayce asked, seeing the obvious tension in Cash's face.

"Tremere just came into town," Cash said. "Julian wants to see if we can find their chantry."

"Tremere, huh?" Rayce asked, displaying no obvious emotion. "That's interesting. Looks like we'll be having some fun around here again pretty soon."

"Dealing with warlocks is fun for you?" Cash asked as he started up his bike.

"Well, you know, I don't get out much," Rayce replied with a smile, turning to go into the Haven.

As Cash pulled away, he considered the mysterious Brujah. No one could say for sure where Rayce came from, but the popular version was that he was from Seattle. At least, that was where Cameron had met him years earlier. As much as Cash tried, he could never bring himself to hate Rayce. He saw him as a threat to his relationship with Sasha, and Rayce's influence on Cameron was leading to the complete overhaul of the Brujah clan in San Francisco into an efficient unit. He had helped to dispense with the days of chaos. That could only spell trouble for those that had historically opposed the Brujah in the city, and that meant the Gangrel might have problems. Still, Rayce always mustered what appeared to be a genuine smile whenever he spoke with Cash, and that went a long way in making the Gangrel primogen wonder if things were indeed as bad as he feared they were.

Inside the club, Rayce went immediately to Sasha's table. "You mind if I join you?" he asked with a smile.

"Well, I was just getting ready to leave," Sasha replied. "But I guess I can stick around for a little while longer."

"Great," Rayce said enthusiastically. "So, you were here with Cash?" Rayce asked conversationally. No hint of jealousy or suspicion was found in his voice, and Sasha found herself drawn into telling Rayce anything that he wanted to know.

"Yeah, but he had to go away on business for my uncle again," Sasha replied. She seemed truly disappointed about Cash's departure.

"So how is Cash lately?" Rayce asked.

"Suspicious of you," Sasha replied without hesitation. "He thinks you and Cameron are up to something, that you're forcing the Brujah to do something that's not in their blood."

"And what do you think?" Rayce questioned, now looking directly into Sasha's eyes.

"It doesn't feel natural, to have all this organization and stuff. I think you guys are taking away the spirit of freedom that makes the clan strong." Sasha felt proud of herself for expressing her belief. Since the death of all of the other Brujah, she ranked as the third oldest member of the clan in the city. It gave her a certain voice in matters, and recently she had begun to take advantage of that, although only with Rayce. She was still too intimidated by Cameron to try to present her ideas to him.

"How long have you been here with your uncle?" Rayce asked.

"About two years," Sasha replied. "Why?"

"Have you been back to your old neighborhood at all since then?" Rayce asked, ignoring Sasha's question.

"No," Sasha answered.

"Well, what if you had to go back there to live?" Rayce continued, still looking directly at Sasha. "Do you think you could manage living in that middle-class suburban life again, after living all this time in Julian's mansion?" Rayce asked. Sasha seemed ready to answer immediately, but Rayce gave her another question to ponder before she could say a word. "Do you think you could live that sedate, ordered life again after living for all this time with the abandon that all Brujah embrace so tightly."

"No," Sasha replied after a moment's more thought. "I don't think I could ever go back to that."

"What if you had to?" Rayce asked her, becoming more intense. "What if there was a pack of garou hunting you down, and the only place you would be safe was in that town. Could you live there then?"

"I suppose I could, for a little while, if my life depended on it," Sasha said reluctantly. "I wouldn't like it, though."

"But do you think you might eventually get used to it?"

"No, never." Sasha replied flatly, no doubt evident in her voice.

"Ok, what if you finally found a way to elude the garou, and you left the town, but you always had to act responsibly, or risk them finding and killing you?" Rayce asked. "Could you manage with that?"

"What is the point of all this?" Sasha asked. "This is stupid, Rayce."

"No, listen Sasha," Rayce almost pleaded. He felt he was close to getting her to understand, but he needed her to follow him for a few moments more. "Could you force a little discipline on yourself if your survival was at stake?"

"If my life depended on it, you mean?" Sasha asked.

"Yes." Rayce watched her as she pondered his question. "You would still have freedom to do whatever you want, you would just have to be responsible, that's all."

"I guess so," Sasha finally responded, though with some reluctance. She hoped that the question and answer period was over so that she could get on her bike and ride along in the night air. That would make her feel a lot better after this meaningless conversation about stuff that would never happen anyway.

"What we're asking the Brujah to do is something that the clan's life depends on," Rayce said. "The clan is dying. Most of our progeny seem to end up being Caitiff nowadays, and almost all that don't end up Caitiff are antitribu, those that join the Sabbat. Brujah within the Camarilla make up a fairly large minority of the Brujah that are embraced. We're a clan full of revolutionaries that can't get together long enough to decide what to rebel against because we all value our individuality too much to follow anyone else. No clan can survive under those circumstances. It ends here and now, in this city. I hate to put it this way, but you can either join Cameron and me in our course of action, or you can leave the city. We will not allow the Brujah to fail again." He thought he had summed up the situation fairly well, and the shocked look on Sasha's face showed Rayce that the young Brujah had understood the seriousness of his words.

"What?" Sasha asked in disbelief. She had always considered Rayce a friend, but now she was left completely alone in the city as far as he was concerned, unless she gave in and joined them in their quest to strip the clan of its identity, its individuality. "You're crazy, Rayce, you can't build a society of individuals, it doesn't work."

"It has worked, at times," he responded coolly, his mind seeming to drift off into a long-forgotten memory. "Read your history books. There have been places where human achievement was unprecedented in the areas of philosophy, commerce, the arts, and politics. The people in these cities were free to express themselves, although they realized that they owed a duty to the society to not push their individual freedoms so far that the social fabric tore. It's the second part of that that the Brujah now forget. Think about it." With

that, Rayce got up and walked out, not bothering to acknowledge the prince. He truly hoped that Sasha would reflect on what he had told her. It did not take a genius to look around at the rest of the West Coast and see the chaos that now enveloped the Brujah clan.

It hurt Rayce a lot to talk so cruelly to Sasha, whom he considered his closest friend in the city, but he felt it was necessary in order to get her to understand. He had to admit, though, that if he could not convince a Brujah of only two years that his course was the right one, then he had no chance of success beyond the borders of the city. The clan would die, unless it were destroyed worldwide on the level to which it was wiped out in San Francisco. He thought of Gehenna, the time when the elders would supposedly rise from the earth and destroy their overpopulated, reckless descendants. Perhaps the Brujah would last long enough to see that time, although he had to admit that it was becoming less and less likely with each passing night.

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IV

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A shadowy form walked around a corner, checking to make sure that the van that Rayce was driving was still within sight. It was, and the watcher relaxed slightly. He had no idea what Rayce was up to, but he did know that it was not sanctioned by the prince. The Gangrel guards made that much evident. Their presence signified many things. First, the Gangrel and Brujah were working together, a fete that was not wise to ignore. Second, they were all concerned about someone finding out what they were up to. _Too late for that_, the watcher thought wryly. The Gangrel had posed no threat of being able to detect his presence. He had been evading sentries for countless years. Gangrel whelps did not even present a challenge to him.

Rayce sat in the driver's seat of the van, looking around intently, wondering where the Gangrel were hiding. Behind him sat Daria and Carter, the two Brujah who had been selected to accompany him. He had spoken on the phone with Theo, and had been assured that the Gangrel's brood of five would be watching out for any Nosferatu that may happen by and take too large an interest in the business of the Brujah. Rayce had placed his order for these weapons three days ago, after Cameron had assured him that Julian could be persuaded to take direct action against the anarchs. _Just another error by the primogen_, Rayce thought.

While it was true that Cameron had come a long way in a short time, it was also evident that he had quite a bit left to learn. He had accepted Rayce's philosophy as far as progeny went, and the Brujah were beginning to be populated by people with brains as well as brawn. The Brujah would no longer be looked down upon as the mindless thugs of the city. However, Cameron still behaved in a way that was going to cause serious problems. The primogen still espoused violence as the best way to resolve issues, and was too vocal in his opposition to Julian. Everyone knew that Cameron wanted to be prince, but few thought he had a snowball's chance in hell of ever achieving the position, at least not for any longer than Eddie Fiori had.

Rayce saw the headlights of the approaching van, rolling slowly down the wet street, and turned back to his two passengers. "Alright, they're here. You two know what to do." Rayce instructed the two young Brujah with him. As soon as he had spoken, Carter was out the back door and climbing up onto the roof, giving his AK-47 one last check to make sure it was ready. Daria picked up a briefcase and followed Rayce out the front of the van. Rayce mentally checked that he had both of his Glocks, though he doubted that he would need them. He then went to the front of the van and watched as his contact pulled up.

"Ah, Mr. Bannon," one man joked as he got out of the other van.

"I told you not to call me that, Carmine," Rayce responded humorlessly. "My name is not an invitation to make references to Johnny Quest." For years people had been making that joke, despite the fact that Rayce had been using his present name for over forty years. What made it worse was just when he thought everyone had forgotten the old animated series, some producers got the bright idea of resurrecting the show. Someday, he decided, he would give everyone a good laugh and cut his hair short, dye it white, and go around in blue jeans and a red button-down shirt, but that would not be until he had time to appreciate humor. From the way things seemed, it would be at least fifty years before he could manage to get Cameron into the prince's seat. _Of course, Cameron could die, and that would hurry things along._ Rayce shook his head, as if trying to jostle the distractions from his mind.

"When will you ever find a sense of humor?" Carmine asked him. As he spoke, two men were climbing out of the back of the van and opening a couple of crates to show samples of the merchandise.

From his perch a couple of stories above the two men, the lone figure sat watching, still completely undetected by the Gangrel guards. He was still amused at how he had noticed the Gangrel immediately. They had probably been meant as a precaution to prevent Nosferatu from spying on the evening's events. He, however, was not as clumsy as one of San Francisco's Nosferatu. He walked right past one of the guards, coming within ten feet of the oblivious Gangrel. He had then climbed to a rooftop that had allowed him to listen to everything that the men below him were saying. This particular transaction was of great interest. It meant little to the watcher that the Brujah and Gangrel were rearming themselves. That had been inevitable. Again he noted that what was significant was that they were doing so together.

The man realized that it had been Rayce that had led the way in preparing the shaky alliance that the normally antagonistic clans had forged. The newly arrived Brujah seemed so familiar to the man above, but he had shaken off the feeling. It was impossible, he decided, that Rayce was that same man he had known so long ago. That almost forgotten warrior would have to be dead after so many years. The man turned again to the scene below, making sure that he would be able to hear everything that was said. He had decided that Rayce merited close attention.

"Humor is overrated," Rayce answered his acquaintance below. "You got everything we asked for?"

"Sure enough," Carmine responded with a wink. He opened a small notebook, and started reading off the inventory. "Let's see, six

MAC-10's, ten Mossberg Model 500 USA shotguns, ten Beretta 92D 9mm double action pistols, and an H&K MSG 90 sniper rifle with night vision and infra-red telescopic scope with ultra-violet targeting. Throw in ten thousand rounds of 9mm explosive-tip rounds, and two thousand shells for the shotguns, plus five hundred armor-piercing for the rifle. It all comes to a grand total of \$43,500." He looked Rayce over, making sure that his contact did, in fact, approve of the shipment. Rayce simply nodded. "I don't want to know what you're planning on using this for, do I?" Carmine asked, his tone becoming slightly more serious.

So many weapons, the man above noted. It seemed as if the two clans were not simply rearming, in open defiance of the prince's edicts, but that they were actually planning to strike someone. _No doubt_, he thought, _they mean to wipe out the anarchs in the city._ He knew the possibilities that would present. Where there was conflict, there would be the opportunity to run an experiment. It seemed as if San Francisco would offer occasion to test the true nature of its kindred residents.

"I'd think you'd rather not know what was going on," Rayce confirmed to Carmine. The Brujah then nodded over to Daria to open the briefcase, which held the payment for this delivery. "I'm going to need to place another order with you in the near future, too," Rayce continued. "I'll get in touch with you when I decide just what I'll be up to." The thought of the Tremere in the city made Rayce very wary, and he wanted to make sure he could get some special weapons on short notice if it became necessary.

"Anytime, my friend. It's always a pleasure," Carmine responded. The weapons dealer then went to the back of the van, joined by Rayce, and the two helped Carmine's men unload the weapons into Rayce's van. Rayce worked quickly, hoping that the Gangrel were as perceptive as everyone gave them credit for being. The thought of the Nosferatu possibly seeing the transaction made Rayce pause for a second. He looked around quickly, wanting to see for himself whether or not they were indeed being watched. His eyes stopped as he scanned the rooftop of an adjacent building as he thought he saw something in the shadows. As quickly as he had thought he had seen it, however, it disappeared. Rayce had seen enough to want to leave as quickly as possible. He was uncertain whether he had actually seen anything, but he did not want to take any chances. Too much was riding on secrecy.

From above, the watcher relaxed his tensed muscles, still in shock that Rayce had appeared to see him. True, he acknowledged, he had not gone to as great lengths as he could have to cloak his presence, but one as young as Rayce was said to be would still not have been able to see him. He pondered for a moment, and watched Rayce load the last of the crates. The way he moved, the way he spoke, everything was too close a match to the man the watcher once knew. It could not be coincidence. The figure sat completely shrouded in the darkness of the shadows for a few silent moments, and then opened a laptop computer, hoping to update a file. He lightly tapped a few keys, and the file came up in front of him:

Name: Sven de Guerre File #: 02357

Clan: Brujah Location: uncertain (last seen in Providence)

Embrace: uncertain (pre-1400) Last Update: 10-3-54

Sire: Callius Moren File #: 00133

Grandsire: Hadrubal File #: 00005

Displayed Disciplines: Brujah, plus celerity, fortitude, dominate, obfuscate

Rating: 68.73

Notable Victories:

(4) Garou

Nicodemus the Praetor: Ventrue Archon (1653)

Muhammad Kholoheh: Assamite assassin (1654)

Kraken: Toreador Methusalah (1792)

Selina (the Harlot): Toreador Prince of Seville (1847)

Karch Duffy: Ventrue Prince of Detroit (1903)

Marty Boviar: Brujah Prince of Chicago (1926)

Sally Moyer: Toreador Justicar (1953)

Desired Confrontations:

Nosferatu elder

Tzimisce elder

As he looked over the file, the shadowy form smiled as the man decided he had finally found the elusive Sven de Guerre. Sven had been a kindred of particular interest and, the watcher remembered, promise. He quickly typed the changes into the computer, making note of the change in name and location. He then moved the cursor under "Desired Confrontations" and added in "Tremere elder." A slight chuckle could be heard, and then the sound of the laptop being closed. None of the kindred were aware of the breach in their security.

Below, Rayce hurriedly finished loading the van and got back into the driver's seat. He disliked being away from any of the Brujah storehouses with this much weaponry, especially when its existence in the city went against the edicts of the prince. He had no desire to play the role of prince killer ever again, and knew that to avoid it he would be forced to toe the line. Behind him, Daria and Carter were oblivious to his pondering, each wrapped up in the thrill of having taken their first step into the Brujah world. The fact that they had been brought along demonstrated the trust that was being placed in them.

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Detective Frank Kohaneck walked into the diner slowly, confidently, scanning his newspaper's headlines for any stories that might be related to the kindred. It had become a habit for him to check on such things lately. There had been a great deal of time since his last meeting with Julian, and Frank had been reduced to reading the paper to find what looked like a possible crime committed by one of Julian's underlings. With a meeting finally impending with the prince of San Francisco, Frank felt that perhaps there was a situation developing that would put him back on the playing field in the city. When he had first learned of the kindred, he felt as if he had been thrust into their world against his will. His girlfriend, Alexandra, had been one of them, and had then been killed in violation of their laws " for revealing her true nature to him. It still hurt a little to think about it, but he had learned a lot about the vampires of San Francisco since then. While their Traditions seemed brutal at first, they had stood the test of time, remaining largely unchanged for centuries. That was more than he could say for the mortal laws that he was employed to enforce.

The society of the kindred fascinated him; he had to admit that now. Long gone were the feelings of hatred for Julian. He disliked the way Julian wielded his power throughout the city with a heavy hand, but that was simply the way of things. The politics was endless, as each of the clans jockeyed for position with the others, trying to claw its way to the top, sometimes literally. He certainly felt alone without the excitement that living on the edge of the kindred world had provided him. Once Eddie Fiori had been killed, there was no one left to pursue except for Julian Luna, and Frank now knew that he would never be able to touch the prince of the city; he was too well protected throughout mortal and kindred society. He could, of course, try to expose Cameron, but he no longer knew what the point of hunting Brujah would be. If he ever could bring down the crime boss, another would simply rise up to take his place. Who knew, perhaps another Eddie Fiori would rise up to power. No one needed that. At least Frank understood where things sat with Cameron, and he was reasonably certain the new Brujah primogen would not turn the city into a shooting gallery like his predecessor had.

He looked up from the paper and scanned the diner, seeing that Julian was already sitting in a booth in the rear. Frank then looked back into the parking lot to double-check for one of Julian's cars. As he had thought, none of the vehicles he knew were out there. With a shrug he went back to the table and sat across from the Ventrue prince.

"What, did you walk down here?" Frank asked. "Or did someone steal your car since you came in?"

"No," Julian replied with a slight smile. "Matt drove me down here in his jeep." He gestured out to a black Humvee in the lot. Only then did Frank notice that Matt was sitting in the vehicle, alertly watching every car that drove by.

"Oh, now that's definitely you," Frank said sarcastically, breaking a slight smile. He had a hard time imagining Julian riding shotgun in a Hummer.

Julian reflected on just how much his relationship with Frank had

changed. At first, the detective had hunted him as a mobster, wishing to bring justice to a mafia crimelord. Then had come the revelation from Alexandra that the mighty Julian Luna was in fact a vampire. As if this fact were not enough reason for Frank to hunt Julian all the more, he also blamed the prince for the death of his beloved Alexandra, who was killed in a blood hunt for endangering the Masquerade. Frank proved to not be a fool, however single-minded he was. He understood quickly that were it not for Julian's protection, resulting from an oath to Alexandra before she died, Eddie Fiori would have killed him long ago.

Having a mortal in the police that knew about the kindred had come to be a great asset. Over time Frank came to understand more and more about the society of the kindred, and was no longer subject to the fear of the unknown. He sought to be a larger part of Julian's business, and had even worked with the prince to an extent when Goth had returned to lead the Nosferatu against the Ventrue prince. After Eddie died, Frank came to play an increasingly diminishing role in Julian's affairs, and had apparently not been content with that situation. According to Sonny, Frank's Ventrue partner, the mortal detective had grown increasingly despondent about being left out of the loop. Sonny had even gone so far as to request permission to offer Frank the opportunity to be embraced.

Not long ago, Julian had been against the embrace of Frank Kohaneck. He felt that being a cop was everything to him, and that if his purpose in life were taken away, Frank would cease to be what it was that made several of the kindred think he would be a worthwhile addition to their ranks. Now, however, it was clear that Frank had been losing something by not being included in their world. Julian had given Sonny permission, with the understanding that he would himself first speak with Frank about the issue, and let him know Sonny's intentions. Not that it was quite as simple as making the offer, however. Julian wanted to search the policeman's personality one last time, to make sure he was worthy of being his grandchild.

Frank, noticing that Julian's thoughts had suddenly started to wander, started waving his hand in front of his face. "Hello, Julian. Are you awake?"

"Yes, Frank." Julian looked Frank over, trying to imagine him as one of the Ventrue, a member of his own lineage. Somehow, it seemed right to him that it should end up that way. "I have a couple of things to speak to you about."

"I figured," Frank answered. "Go ahead." Just as Julian was about to begin, the waitress came over and asked Frank if he'd like anything. After quickly ordering coffee and some fries, Frank sent her on her way.

"Well," Julian began, "I have a problem with what we call anarchs. You probably know of these particular anarchs as two new gangs that have come into the city."

"The Brotherhood and The Sons of Cronus," Frank said, confirming Julian's belief.

"Yes," Julian affirmed. "They don't fall under the usual clan structure, and like the anarchs that are all too common in other

California cities, they do not recognize the authority of a prince. We would normally wipe them out, but we don't have the soldiers to accomplish such a large job. Our figures put the Brotherhood at eight members, and the Sons at at least a dozen, not including ghouls."

"Ghouls?" Frank asked curiously. "That's a new one."

"A ghoul is simply the term we use to refer to a human that has drank the blood of a vampire," Julian explained. "After three drinks, they are bound irrevocably to their master, but they never age as long as they continue to feed once in awhile. They also are gifted with superhuman strength. Many humans would refer to them as retainers. They give the vampire a pair of eyes during the day, when we are forced to sleep."

"So you don't think you can deal with them?" Frank asked.

"If forced to, we could," Julian answered. "However, our losses would be high, and we're in no position to suffer another decrease in our numbers."

"Understood," Frank said. "Sonny said you lost a lot of people in that whole invasion thing a few months ago."

"Yes," Julian replied with a sigh. "Besides, we have no wish to create a gang war on the streets of San Francisco. It would endanger innocent mortals, and it would be bad for the tourist industry, which a few of my businesses thrive on."

"So what do you need?" Frank asked. He found himself surprisingly willing to help the Ventrue prince he had once sworn to destroy.

"Increased patrols in the Mission District and Chinatown, if you can pull some strings," Julian answered. "Let them know they're being watched. Make it bad for them to do business with mortals. They might leave of their own accord, without any direct action being necessary. At least, that's what we hope."

"I'll see what I can do," Frank said. "What else did you want to talk to me about?"

"Sonny said you've not been happy being left out of our affairs so much," Julian replied bluntly.

"It's not that," Frank started, surprised at Julian's directness. "It's just that I found out about this whole secret world, and I seemed to be a known player in it. Then, one morning it all went away. It's just tough to accept that it's all gone. I think it's something like when I had to take a medical leave after getting shot. Every time I heard the sirens, I wanted to be back on the street. I was going crazy because I was left out of everything."

Julian nodded as Frank spoke, indicating that he understood. "Sonny has recently expressed an interest in embracing you," Julian said. Frank's face remained expressionless. "You are, of course, free to think this over for as long as you'd like. It is a major decision."

"You mean Sonny has offered to sire me into the kindred?" Frank asked.

"Yes," Julian answered. "Think it over. It would get you included in our world for as long as you manage to live." The words carried the promise of everything that Frank wanted so badly, but also clearly related the truth of the situation — that being in the world of the kindred was not a safe life. Death was always just an unknown enemy away.

"When do you need an answer by?" Frank asked.

"By the time you grow old and die," Julian said. "Once you die of natural causes, we can't do anything with you. Until then, the offer stands."

"I'll think about it," Frank answered as Julian got up to leave. The Ventrue dropped a twenty on the table as he left.

"The fries are on me," he said with a smile.

As Frank watched Julian walk out, he was completely overcome with confusion. A couple of years ago he would have killed Julian for the offer, but now he was seriously considering accepting, and entering the world of the kindred.

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VI

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Hank Richards sat in his office, looking out the window at the dark streets of North Beach, a small Italian neighborhood that could be referred to as the Little Italy of San Francisco. It had been only a couple of weeks since he had brought the Sons of Cronus to the city, but it was already obvious that his clan would do all right there. His friends back in Denver had said he was crazy to go to San Francisco. It was infamous among the anarchs of the country as being particularly inhospitable to those that did not submit to the authority of the prince. Apparently, Julian Luna had killed every anarch that had ever settled in his city, and had given the Nosferatu authority to kill anyone they knew of that had been in the city for longer than three weeks without presenting themselves to the prince for entrance. Of course, in one more week's time, it was possible that the Nosferatu would all come knocking on his door, but he doubted it. Every kindred in the city knew about the Sons of Cronus, and they all knew that Julian had not done anything.

As Hank thought about it more and more, it became obvious to him that Julian was a whole lot weaker than everyone thought. In fact, he figured there was a chance that within a short time he might actually be able to make a play for the city himself. There was no one he had ever met in the kindred community outside of Europe that could ever challenge him. _Hell_, Hank thought, _my blood was powerful enough to start my own clan. That kind of potency is rare enough. It hardly ever happens._

Hank's gloating to himself over his position in San Francisco was interrupted by a knock on his door. "Come in," he yelled, irritated

at the distraction. He knew that there was actually much work to be done in the city. His clan had to find a couple of more ghouls to guard the brownstone they had acquired to use as a safehouse, and they also had to extend their reach into the criminal world of the city. Surprisingly enough, he was encountering resistance from Brujah, which were rarely into organized crime. They were usually little more than street toughs and thugs, but here the entire clan seemed to be in a position of interest over the underworld.

The door had not opened when he had yelled for it to be, and he shouted louder. "Come on in, are you deaf?" Still there was no answer at the door, and after a few more moments, and another knock, Hank got out of his chair and crossed to the door. "I told you guys, I'm not in the mood for games!" he grated as he walked to the door. As soon as he opened the door, he felt a vice-like grip close around his throat, and he was lifted off of the floor.

"We are not in the mood for games either, Mr. Richards," a voice responded. Hank looked down to see Robert Boccaccio holding him two feet off the floor, exerting the necessary force with only one arm. The Tremere was flanked once again by Solomon and Patrick. Solomon was dragging Hank's child Zack's staked body into the room, and Patrick was drawing a Spanish broadsword from an ornate scabbard. Before the leader of the Sons of Cronus could say a word, he was tossed across the twenty-foot room, against the wall on the far side.

Hank sprang to his feet as quickly as possible, using his blood to heal the slight wounds he had taken from the throw. "Who the fuck are you guys?" he demanded as Robert approached him once again.

"You will answer all of my questions, Mr. Richards, and you will comply with all of my demands. Do you understand?" Boccaccio simply looked down at him with a look of indifference, now gently tapping the tip of his cane against the floor as he spoke, accentuating each statement he made.

"Do you know who I am?" Richards asked, now regaining his composure. He would be damned if he would let this Euro-trash come into his office and make demands of him.

"Yes, Mr. Richards, you are the progenitor of the Sons of Cronus, the self-proclaimed saviors of the kindred," Boccaccio said with slight, but still apparent, amusement. "You plan to hunt down the elders to free the younger generations from the influence of their sires. You are the newest enemies of Clan Tremere."

Hank's face went completely white as he heard the name of Boccaccio's clan, and he quickly lost the resolve that he had felt only moments earlier. Fear raced down his spine, and his legs suddenly felt as if they made of Jell-O. He could not even think of a response, so greatly was he gripped with terror. He had heard several stories of the Tremere, but had never met one before. Somehow, he thought, the stories did not seem to catch the strength that the Tremere before him so casually displayed.

"I see you understand your situation more fully," the old Tremere began. "You will vacate the premises, and renounce any claim you had to North Beach, as it is now the home of the Tremere. You will gather the remaining members of your clan, and move to Chinatown. We will

not interfere with you there, at least not for now." Boccaccio looked over the young upstart, gauging just how far he should push him.

"What do you mean the remaining members of my clan?" Hank asked, struggling to speak through his fear. In response, Patrick swung the sword, cleanly taking the head from Hank's childe. Hank was again struck speechless, and found himself unable to avert his gaze from the decapitated body of his childe.

"That was your first childe, I believe, Mr. Richards," Boccaccio said coolly. "We will proceed to kill all of the others, and their progeny, until you are all that's left if that is what it takes to achieve your compliance. Please understand that we are not making a request, we are stating demands. You will leave." He glared at the young anarch, whose blood seemed to chill under the scrutiny of the Tremere.

"Yeah, we'll leave," Hank said. "Anything you guys want, just let me know." He bolted past the body of his extinguished childe and ran out the door, unable and unwilling to hide his fear. The rest of his clan would be arriving back at the house fairly soon with the approaching dawn, and he had to wait around for them to return. Then he would have to find accommodations during the day. All in all, though, he was grateful to be alive. The Tremere were not ones to be crossed, he knew that much. However, if he could manage to get on their good side, they could make fantastic allies, especially if he could get the Tremere to finish off the Sons' enemies in the Camarilla. Hank ran out through the door, down the stairs, and out onto the street.

From the window above, Robert Boccaccio watched as the terrified anarch emerged from the door below, heading out onto the street. "Solomon, make sure that the anarchs receive some compensation for the building we have taken from them. We don't want to have to deal with ignorant neonates seeking vengeance. It would be a tremendous waste of time." Solomon nodded in response, and dug a notebook out of an attaché case he had retrieved from the hallway.

The scene was set. Boccaccio would use the anarchs to soften up the Ventrue and their Gangrel supporters, and then he would strike, removing them from power. Within only a year the Tremere would probably hold the city. Once that happened, Boccaccio was certain, the Sabbat invasion that was being planned would never succeed. The Ventrue could never hold the city against the Sabbat, but the Tremere would certainly be able to prevail.

"Call Douglas," Robert said, turning to Solomon. He referred to the ghoul that his childe was using as a retainer. Douglas was formerly a successful trial lawyer, and had been chosen to become Patrick's first childe when Robert and Solomon departed San Francisco, leaving the city to Solomon's capable childe.

"Should I have him make the usual arrangements?" Solomon asked. The Tremere had decided to use the building taken from the Sons of Cronus as their chantry, or guild house. It was common for the ghoul in the coterie to furnish the Tremere chantry with black velvet curtains to keep sunlight out during the day, and to move in many of the magical fetishes that the clan used in its rites. By using the ghoul to take care of the work, everything would be ready for the Tremere when they awoke the next evening.

"Absolutely," Boccaccio responded. "I also heard there is a series this weekend between the Giants and the Braves. Have Douglas get tickets for the Friday night game." While he was thoroughly ruthless in his devotion to the goals of his clan, Boccaccio also felt the urge to go out and enjoy a baseball game occasionally. The Braves had been his favorite team since their days back in Boston, the first city the old Tremere had lived in when he had come to the New World so many decades ago. Besides, going to a stadium full of mortals also presented a multitude of opportunities to feed.

His instructions given, Boccaccio moved to the back room of the third floor of the building, looking in disgust at the windows. The previous residents had painted the windows over with black paint to keep out the light. The windows would have to be replaced. He would not give up his view of San Francisco at night just because the Sons of Cronus had been overly paranoid about sunlight. He gave one last instruction to Solomon to have that chore taken care of during the day, and then retired into the closet, so that the work done in the room that would serve as his quarters would not disturb his sleep.

CHAPTER 2

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I

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The sun had just dropped below the horizon when Hank woke up abruptly. He looked around the room of the Lombard Plaza Motel, seeing some of his other clan members still sleeping. He could not shake the feeling that they were not alone in the room. He gathered his energy and stood up, feeling something on his chest. When he looked down he saw a piece of paper held to the front of his shirt by a safety pin. Suddenly alerted to the fact that someone had managed to break in without waking him or any of his clanmates, Hank drew his Glock and scanned the room. "Everyone wake up," he yelled. "There's someone here!"

Barb was the first one to awaken, shooting up into a crouch and drawing a .38 revolver as she hunched protectively over her child, Erica, who had been her lover during her mortal life. Marco was almost as quick in waking, though Erica and Billy still slumbered. After a few tense moments of paranoia, Hank told himself that if anyone was there and planning to kill him, he probably would have done so by that point. Hank lowered his gun and pulled the paper from his chest, slowly reading it over as Marco and Barb woke their still-sleeping clanmates.

As he looked at the message, written in flowing script, Hank was suddenly struck with a feeling of curiosity as to its author's identity. He reread the letter, making sure it said what he thought it did. "Offer an alliance with the Tremere. Say you'll be their foot soldiers in exchange for protection from the Brujah should they become too aggressive in defending the business you're taking from them." The letter was simply signed "a friend."

"What do you make of this?" he asked Barb as he handed her the paper.

Now that Zack was dead, Barb was Hank's oldest childe, and the position of second-in-command was hers. She seemed to accept the responsibility eagerly.

She looked the note over a couple of times herself before speaking. "It could be a Tremere trick," she responded. "They might just want to get us to be their soldiers, expendable assets. They're going to make a play for this city sometime soon, and it would be natural to use us to do it. You know you can't trust the warlocks." As Hank listened to his childe speak, he was suddenly regretful that he hadn't taken her advice more in the past. She had the ability to look right at the point of a problem and bring up issues that he had not considered himself.

"What if it isn't, though?" he asked his childe. "We could certainly use a friend right now."

"I think it's too great a risk to take," Barb answered. "I will, of course, follow you in any decision you make regarding the issue."

Hank marveled at Barb's loyalty and discipline. She obviously had accepted the structured ways of their clan very readily, and saw herself as just another unit of a machine controlled by the progenitor of the clan. Gone was the independence that was the hallmark of the Brujah blood which had spawned the founder of the Sons of Cronus; he was sure they would one day become a powerful force.

"I have to take the chance," he returned. "If there's someone else looking to make a power play, and we fall in with him now, we may be able to get back our lost territory, plus a little more."

"It sounds like the kind of scheme one of the elders would play," Barb returned matter-of-factly. "We shouldn't allow ourselves to get caught up in their games, Hank. We have sworn ourselves to rid our brothers of the elders' sinister influence."

"If it is an elder, we can turn on him later," Hank responded confidently. "For now, we will use him as he tries to use us. We will prevail."

"As you command, my sire," Barb answered respectfully as she turned to gather her things.

"I will go and speak with the Tremere, you take the others and find a haven for us in Chinatown," Hank instructed. "We don't need anything fancy, just somewhere to keep all of our weapons. A low profile might be the best thing right now." Hank checked his pistol one last time before leaving to speak with the Tremere, and then walked quickly through the door.

"Yes, sir," Barb answered as Hank left. She dragged some of the rifles out from under the bed, and started checking that they were loaded properly. While they would be taking a building from only a small group of mortals, they could still possibly meet some resistance. Of course, if they were lucky they could get themselves some ghouls and maybe another clan member in their new building, but that was something to be decided once they had found the proper location. She would have to get the rest of the clan ready first,

however.

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II

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The primogen sat around the conclave table, looking intently at one another. They all knew that this would most likely be the last time that they would be able to see the familiar faces together without the ominous cloud of Tremere meddling hanging over the proceedings of the city's kindred governing body. The chair reserved for the Tremere primogen was conspicuously empty, as Boccaccio did not seem to be in a hurry to arrive promptly.

Julian's thoughts raced through his head as he considered how greatly things had changed within San Francisco. Just three months ago he had allowed the Telemon clan to gain a seat on the conclave. This had been a momentous occasion, as it was the first time in history that a non-founding member of the Camarilla was permitted to sit on a major city's conclave. The inference to be drawn from the event was obvious -- an anarch bloodline had been accepted into full membership status of the Camarilla. Perhaps, Julian thought, this would begin to happen more in the future. It would certainly help control the masses of anarchists which made enforcement of the Traditions such a difficult prospect in modern kindred society.

Now, however, another seat was being made at the conclave table. This was not done for some upstart bloodline that was trying to make a name for itself in the kindred world, but was done for one of the older and most feared clans of all -- the Tremere. The warlocks had been one of the seven founding clans of the Camarilla, as at the time they had been a young clan constantly teetering on the brink of extinction as a result of wars with some of the other more ancient clans. The Camarilla had offered the Tremere protection, breathing room in which to foster their young children. Over the centuries they had grown strong. It was generally acknowledged that the Ventrue held the largest amount of influence within the Camarilla, but that belief was slowly coming into question as the Tremere grew stronger. It would not be long, Julian knew, before the Tremere would be able to start consolidating some of the major cities in the world under princes from their own clan. The trend had already started, as the Tremere had recently taken dominion over Madrid, Bonn, Berlin, Orleans, and Athens. With power in the Old World, they would soon be able to exert more pressure over cities in the Americas. Julian realized this meant greater pressure would be placed on him.

"What the hell is taking them so long?" Cash asked, finally allowing his anxiety to get the best of him as he broke the silence.

"Maybe they decided to leave town," Cameron said with a grin. "It was just a thought," he added in response to the disapproving stare he had received from Lillie.

"It's not a thought you should even be having," the Toreador primogen returned. "The Tremere are not to be trifled with, and you had damn well be ready to deal with them. Hoping they'll go away won't do you any good."

Cameron simply sneered in response, but held his tongue. He was constantly having to watch what he said around the other primogen, so bad was his position in the city. Another new clan was entering the city, and it would arrive with a higher status than the Brujah, just as the Telemon had. While it was to be expected with the Tremere, he had been truly insulted by the respect accorded to the young bloodline that had emerged from the Brujah clan. It seemed as though Matt and his clan actually received respect for turning their backs on their original clan and starting a new bloodline. Indeed, given the level of anti-Brujah bias that existed in the city, it was very possible that that was exactly what the other clans liked about clan Telemon. Of course, the facts that the young vampires were loyal to the prince, were generally non-political, and excelled in combat did not hurt at all, either.

Matt Reimer looked at the faces of the other primogen with interest, oblivious to the thoughts that Cameron was having about clan Telemon's lack of worth. Matt was thoroughly divided in his opinion of the Tremere. He had faced the clan once before, and his clan had won. In fact, his grandsire had managed to diablerize the primogen of the Tremere within the city. As far as he could tell, the warlocks had not ever seemed overly tough. His sire, however, had warned him strongly about the Tremere. His sire, Johnny Yashida, had been the information broker within the clan, and had probably forgotten more than most kindred his age knew, but Matt still could not bring himself to hold the Tremere in too high a regard. No one could possibly be as powerful as the Tremere, by all accounts, seemed to be.

All of the primogen were knocked out of their private thoughts when the door to the conclave room was thrown open by Boccaccio, who was flanked as always by Solomon and Patrick. The grand entrance seemed to suit the Tremere elder, Julian mused. The Tremere were all dressed in their customary black clothing, and Boccaccio was carrying the same cane he always seemed to have with him.

"This is a meeting of the primogen," Lillie started. "The rest of your clan will have to wait outside."

"I have simply brought my coterie with me in order to introduce them to the collected primogen of the city," Boccaccio answered smoothly. "I thought you would appreciate the gesture. I am sorry if I have committed a faux pas of some kind."

"No, that is acceptable," Julian answered. He wanted to avoid any bad start in the addition of the Tremere to the city. Anyway, he thought, the added formality is nice for a change. Ordinarily, it would have been acceptable for the primogen to announce the numbers of his clan to the collected primogen. Introductions would have been necessary only for the prince of the city.

"Thank you," Boccaccio answered with a slight bow of the head. "I introduce to you my childe Solomon Fisk, and his childe Patrick Collins. We all submit, of course, to the authority of this body."

Cameron had to stop himself from gagging as the Tremere elder laid the formalities on ultra-thick. As he thought about it, he decided that low status might be worth it if it prevented him from having to kiss the prince's ass the way Boccaccio currently was. He looked

across to Cash, his newest partner in crime, and saw that the Gangrel primogen was having the same reaction to the Tremere's grandeur.

Boccaccio dismissed his brood, closed the door, and took the vacant seat at the table. As he sat down, his body almost seemed to settle as if it had been made to sit there, at that table. For any that had doubted it, the fact was clear that the Tremere had arrived, and were to be there for some time to come. There were now seven primogen sitting at the table, which meant that the intrigue that was the hallmark of kindred existence would become even more convoluted, so exceedingly intricate that perhaps no one would ever be able to say with any certainty that he knew what was going on.

"I am sorry for my late arrival," Boccaccio apologized, "but I felt you might all enjoy the time to speak once more about what the arrival of my clan means to the rest of you."

"What?" Julian asked, surprised at the gall that the Tremere primogen was showing.

"It is well known by the members of my clan that there are certain prejudices against us," Boccaccio replied, his voice holding a tinge of regret at his clan's reputation. "We accept this, as prejudices are to be expected in any society." As he spoke, he quickly glanced toward Daedalus and Cameron, as if he expected them to understand the point more than the others. "I simply wanted you all to have the chance to get all your fears and accusations out in the open amongst each other, and now that you have all vented, I will attempt to set your minds at ease."

The confidence that Boccaccio had in his position was overwhelming, and Julian was forced to see why the clan had been so successful over the past few centuries. "We thank you," the prince said, "but around here actions speak louder than words. Behave yourselves, respect the Traditions and Commandments, and you will always be welcome in my domain."

"Well stated," Boccaccio replied with a thin smile. He had been particularly amused by Julian's continued belief that the city was still under his control. The prince had no idea that Hank Richards, the leader of the Sons of Cronus, had offered earlier in the evening to enter into an alliance with the Tremere. The problem of numbers had been solved, and Boccaccio was already beginning to come up with schemes to force Julian out of power.

"I trust you have been able to find proper accommodations?" Julian asked.

"Yes, the Tremere have settled in North Beach," Boccaccio replied. All of the primogen registered some slight degree of surprise at this, as they all knew that this was an area that had been claimed by the Sons of Cronus. "I trust your reactions are due to the fact that the Sons of Cronus had previously claimed that area," the confident warlock added, knowing his words likely made it seem as if he could read his counterparts' minds. "We have removed the anarch infestation from that part of the city. It is now Tremere territory. We would appreciate it if the rest of the clans attempted to stay out."

"You will not start to carve up my city," Julian said forcefully. He

saw what the Tremere were doing, trying to take small pieces of the city at a time, and he would be damned if he allowed that to happen. "This city is mine. I control all of it. There are no vassals controlling small fiefs in my territory. You accept my rules or you leave San Francisco."

Boccaccio looked at the prince, a thin smile beginning to form on his lips. He was amused at the insistence of the prince. However, Luna was correct in denying the Tremere dominion of North Beach. To have done otherwise would have seriously undermined his authority. "I apologize once again," the Tremere responded. "It is simply that things are done differently in some other cities. We withdraw any claim to North Beach, as it rightfully belongs to the prince of the city."

"Very well," Julian responded. He was already getting to the point where he had had it with the Tremere.

"However," Boccaccio continued, "I advise you all that the Tremere will be centered in North Beach. You have all heard about our blood magic, and you all have likely heard rumors that we are constantly researching new ways of applying our sorcery. If any of you are to set foot in North Beach, I could not guarantee the safety of the members of your clans. Magical accidents have been known to happen." The smile had vanished, but Julian could still tell that Boccaccio was amused, launching veiled threats against the primogen of the city. The prince marveled at the ease that Boccaccio was able to subtly play upon the fears of the kindred at the table in order to achieve the same results that his previous, forbidden claim had attempted.

"We trust you to take the greatest care in all of your endeavors," Julian responded purposefully. "I will hold your clan responsible for any negligence in your pursuit of knowledge." He knew that Boccaccio had understood his response, that territoriality within his city would not be tolerated, whether it was disguised as accident or not.

"Of course," Boccaccio answered. "About the anarch problem, though, what exactly is being done about them?" the Tremere asked, wishing to put the prince on the spot. Julian Luna had a reputation across the country as being an extremely ruthless prince when his territory was threatened. It was to be expected, especially after he learned at the feet of Archon, one of the most violent princes the New World had ever seen. The fact that Julian had thus far not taken action against the anarchs spoke volumes about his current level of strength. The prince was weak, Boccaccio realized. He simply wanted to know just how weak.

"We have decided to use our mortal contacts to make the city inhospitable to the anarchs," Julian answered, trying to make the response seem like the most reasonable course of action, and not a sign of vulnerability. "Bad publicity in the press will lead to greater civic action to control what the city will see as a gang violence problem. They will eventually be forced to leave of their own accord."

"That is excellent," Boccaccio stated, having heard all that he had wanted to. "The avoidance of violence is necessary in order to uphold the Masquerade. I'm glad you have enough control of the clans to hold

them off while the subtle approach works. Not many princes could succeed in such an endeavor." Even as he spoke the words, Boccaccio tossed around ideas in his head that would effectively lead to the loss of Julian's ability to hold such a high level of control over the clans.

"We do our best," Julian replied.

"Is there anything you need to know about me, then?" Boccaccio asked the primogen. When none of them responded, he rose from his chair and surveyed them once more. "Then I take my leave of you, as I have much to do this evening."

He seemed to glide across the room to the door, and he silently departed the mansion, leaving the remaining primogen to contemplate the gravity of the situation.

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III

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In the mind of the old Nosferatu, the dilapidated building that The Brotherhood of the Holy Fist called home evoked memories of Berlin after the Second World War. For over a century he had lived in structures such as this, though, and it seemed comfortable to him. He thought it fitting that one so obviously outside the scope of human society should dwell within the buildings that human society had deemed expendable. He knew that the kindred who followed him were not crazy about living in conditions such as this, but they had been ordered to go to San Francisco, and so they had. He turned from his thoughts to the task at hand — the training of the young kindred, the turning over of the secrets of the oldest of the kindred. The seven members of the Brotherhood went through their routines, attempting to achieve the level of martial arts mastery that their mentor had risen to. After a particularly noticeable failure in a throw, one of his charges broke away from his sparring partner and approached the old Nosferatu.

"What did I do wrong, Sisyphus?" the young kindred asked. "I know I had the grapple correct, but I was still unable to throw him." He gestured back to Wes, the Ravnos that had been posing as a sparring partner for this confused apprentice.

"Remember to center your own weight, Vlad," Sisyphus responded. "Once that is accomplished, allow the strength to flow from your center. Use your hips rather than your arms to generate movement of your opponent. You will never be able to outmuscle another kindred with just your upper body. Use every muscle, and you will succeed." Vlad bowed shortly and returned to practice.

Sisyphus reflected on Vlad. He was the one who belonged in the group least, and everyone would be willing to agree to that. Generally, the Ravnos, Wes, would have been labeled the unique individual, but even he seemed normal compared to Vlad, a Tzimisce that had descended from East European nobility. The young kindred was, however, the most motivated of the group in his study of the martial arts. He wished to learn as much as he could, but like many young anarchists he was impatient. He wished to rush toward the destiny that he had set for

himself. This was no small destiny, Sisyphus mused. Vlad wished to rebuild the Tzimisce clan to its former glory, to avenge the clan on the Tremere, who had all but wiped out the East European clan that had since fallen in with the Sabbat.

So it went for three hours, with all of the members of the Brotherhood practicing a wide variety of techniques. Within a few decades they would all be among the greatest hand-to-hand fighters in the world; they would just have to keep themselves out of danger until then. Danger had a certain fascination for all of them though, for a variety of reasons. Paul and his three Brujah felt they made a social statement every time they went out and caused chaos, while Wes and Waggs, a Ventrue antitribu, just liked to have a little fun. Vlad saw every night's excursions as a chance to hone his skills for the inevitable battles against the Tremere. Sisyphus would never go with them, however. He knew the fear that humans would feel if they were to set their eyes upon him, and he had no desire to provoke the violent reaction that always quickly followed in the wake of human fear and lack of understanding.

"Let's get going," Paul finally said. "There's so much we could be doing, we'd be silly to stay around here all night." The Brujah leader of the Brotherhood was always eager to get out on the streets. He loved being among mortals, and he loved even more to be around those of his own kind. In anarch circles, the Brotherhood was known as a small gang that was not to be messed with. The training that they had received was already enough to give them an edge in a fight with almost any anarch gang. Paul wanted more, though, and the rest of the gang felt the same way. He wanted the respect and fear accorded to those few anarchs strong enough to have deposed a prince. That is why he had come to San Francisco, the city of Julian Luna. This city was one of the least accepting of anarch incursions, but the prince had recently been weakened. Setting up shop here in San Francisco would make the Brotherhood a group of living legends among the anarchs.

"What do you have in mind for tonight, boss man?" Waggs asked. The Ventrue antitribu served as Paul's second-in-command. The two of them had been friends in their mortal life, and their sires had known each other when they embraced the two twenty years earlier. Now they traveled around the country, going from city to city, usually at the whim of Wes, who had a gift for finding some of the most entertaining places in North America. Occasionally they were officially ordered to go to a city, as had been the case with San Francisco. However, this was rarely a problem, as they were all able to find something in their destination that interested them, as Paul's desire to depose a prince had made him happy with this city.

"I'm thinking we can beat up on a few Gangrel tonight," Paul answered. "They seem to have a liking for our part of town, and I sure as hell don't have a liking for them being anywhere near us."

"Gangrel sounds fine to me," Kenny put in. He was Paul's first childe, and had a violent streak that sometimes landed the rest of the group in trouble. It was to settle him down that Paul had permitted Kenny to embrace a childe. After bringing Donny into the group, Kenny had settled down quite a bit, though he was still given to a few occasional fits of anger.

Donny was already in the weapons cabinet, breaking out everyone's weapon of choice and distributing them to his packmates. The entire group preferred hand-held melee weapons to guns, though they each did carry a pistol. They were not stupid enough to overlook the advantage that could be gained by an enemy that could hurt them from a distance, though they still knew that their own greatest advantage would be gained in close-quarters. They left Sisyphus alone in the old building that served as their haven, and went out into the night to hunt down Gangrel interlopers.

It was not long before they were able to locate the two that most often encroached on their territory " Jake and his true brother, T.J. The two were the youngest of the new Gangrel acquisitions in the city, and would make easy targets. The two Gangrel were apparently oblivious to the danger that slowly approached as they sat on their motorcycles outside a corner deli.

Kenny went into an adjoining building, and up to the roof. He then crossed over onto the roof of the deli and the apartments above, and prepared to drop down the three stories onto the two Gangrel before they would be able to get away. Vlad proceeded to walk straight down the street towards them, concealing behind him a Scottish claymore. From across the street, Paul and his other child, Tim, waited with Donny to race across at the two Gangrel.

The trap was sprung as soon as they were all in place, and the Gangrel reacted in panic. Kenny landed on top of Jake, taking him to the ground and breaking the legs of both kindred. Kenny rolled away, using his blood to heal his wounds as Vlad came in against T.J., cutting a wicked slash across his chest with the large sword before the Gangrel could react to the attack. Jake struggled to his feet, but was put right back down to the ground as Paul arrived, striking his opponent hard in the back of the head with a pair of nunchaku. T.J. drew a revolver and shot Vlad before the Tzimisce could dodge, but a moment later the gun was knocked out of his hand by a whip. Wes grinned as he proceeded to repeatedly strike the younger Gangrel in the face with the bullwhip, and Vlad would stab the Gangrel whenever he found an opening between strikes from the Ravnos.

Jake, however, was in worse shape. He was rolling around on the ground, his legs still broken from Kenny's attack, and he was being bludgeoned by the nunchaku and a bo staff being used by Donny. Tim was getting in on the action as well, using a straight razor to cut slashes in Jake's arms as he held them up to fend off his attackers.

All of a sudden, a loud whistle could be heard on a nearby rooftop, and the anarchs all ceased their attack and ran off. From the roof across the street, Waggs had seen the approaching police cars and sent the warning out to his packmates. The police had been sending more and more patrols into the neighborhood during the last few days, and it had only been a matter of time before one would show up, especially after the gunshot.

Paul broke off from the rest of the Brujah and was joined by Vlad, and the two of them raced down the street and into an alley. They quickly stopped and began to revel in the success of their attack.

"Damn punks never knew it was coming," Paul said excitedly.

"Cops showed up too soon, though," Vlad replied. "I wanted to make the younger one's jaw all crooked, and cause his skin to droop down to the right side of his face." Paul only shuddered in response. While he was more than willing to attack his enemies with weapons, he did not see the point in permanently disfiguring them. He might as well just extinguish them, as far as he was concerned. Vlad, however, was different. As a Tzimisce, he had the clan's ability to perform what they referred to as body sculpting. While it could be used to great effect in increasing one's physical attractiveness, it could also be used to permanently disfigure an individual. Throughout history, the Tzimisce had been known as having fairly unattractive enemies, as many of them had been sculpted by these foul kindred, the one clan that embodied most of what humanity feared in vampire legends.

The moment of mirth was quickly lost, though, when both kindred simultaneously caught sight of a shadow in the alley, slowly moving toward them. The figure stood almost six and a half feet tall, and had almost impossibly wide, heavily muscled shoulders. Shadows obscured the face of the individual, and a heavy black cloak concealed the rest. The two settled down as quickly as they had jumped, though, when they realized that their patron was now making a visit to them.

"Why did you not finish off those Gangrel?" the large man asked.

"We didn't have time," Paul said, starting to feel a little unsettled.

"You wasted too much time toying with them," the figure responded, his voice becoming lower and more threatening. "It is no matter, though. I have something for you to do."

"What is it?" Paul asked. The large kindred served as the Brotherhood's patron, supplying them with weapons and money, and occasionally removing a serious threat to their safety. It was the duty of the Brotherhood to serve their patron, and that was the main reason they had come to San Francisco. It was at his request. All other reasons having to do with Paul's quest for status in the anarch community had been secondary.

"You have agreed with the Sons of Cronus that neither anarch gang would attack the other, correct?" he asked.

"Yes, they agreed to leave us alone," Paul answered. "Julian Luna is the enemy that we both have to worry about. We didn't want to start going at it with each other with him around."

"You must do more than agree not to attack them," the shadowed figure said.

"What should we do, then?" Vlad asked before Paul could.

"Go to the Sons of Cronus and offer an alliance," their patron instructed. "They have been thrown out of North Beach by the Tremere, but have agreed to work with the warlocks in exchange for protection from the Brujah. The Sons would gladly accept any increase in their ranks, since the Tremere will doubtlessly use the anarchs to soften up Luna's position in the city. Make sure that the Sons do not let

the Tremere know what you're doing. I don't want the Tremere to be able to make any preparations."

"Preparations for what?" Paul asked.

"A research project I have in mind," the figure answered. "Now go."

"I don't want to work with the Sons if they're working with the Tremere," Vlad said, refusing to leave the alley. "I seek only to destroy the Tremere and all who work with them. I think we should extinguish the Sons of Cronus."

"Idiot!" the larger figure spat at him. "By working with the Sons, you will give them hope of being able to turn on their Tremere masters. The Tremere took half of the Sons' turf; they'll help you at the drop of a hat. Now be gone before I rip your head off for your insolence."

The two anarchs raced off, already talking about how they would approach the Sons of Cronus to speak with them about an alliance. Paul was sure that the new bloodline would accept the offer, though. The Sons of Cronus despised the elders of the kindred, and would delight in any chance to work with the younger members of kindred society to oppose the old Tremere who had arrived. He only needed to be able to convince them that it was possible to turn on the Tremere later.

Behind them, in the alley, the Brotherhood's patron smiled in satisfaction. The Tremere would probably use the Sons of Cronus to anger the Brujah, counting on the rabble to retaliate. Once that happened, it would be clear that Luna's plan to get rid of the anarchs would not work, because he lacked control of the clans. The Tremere would then challenge for power. He would then be able to expose the whole plan to Rayce, who would doubtlessly try to kill Boccaccio for his third-party attacks against the Brujah. Once that happened, he would finally be able to gauge the strength that he was sure Rayce had been hiding. It had been so many years since he had seen Rayce, and the Brujah had been an excellent warrior even so long ago. The Brotherhood's patron wondered how strong Rayce might have become in the intervening years.

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IV

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In the warehouse that the Brujah and Gangrel had converted into a shooting range, Cash and Rayce watched with approval as the members of the two clans worked together to learn how to load, strip down, and rebuild the weapons that had been bought the previous evening. By the following night they would begin firing the weapons, but the Brujah ghouls needed one more day to finish soundproofing the warehouse. It would be unfortunate if the Nosferatu were to discover their preparations after all the lengths they had gone to in order to protect secrecy the night before.

The instructions that Carter was giving were suddenly interrupted as Jake and T.J. staggered into the warehouse. Both were still seriously

injured, despite the time they had had to heal the wounds that the Brotherhood had inflicted upon them.

"What the hell happened?" Cash asked as he ran over to his most recent child. Jake only collapsed to the floor, no longer possessing enough strength to even speak.

"We got jumped by the Brotherhood," T.J. answered. "We accidentally wandered into their territory, and they beat the piss out of us." He slumped down onto the floor over his brother, checking to see if Jake was still coherent.

"That's it, we kill those bastards tonight," Cash snarled.

"The hell we do," Rayce said emphatically, walking over to join the conversation. "There will be no action taken until we're ready. You agreed to those terms. When we're ready, Cash, not before," Rayce repeated, making sure the Gangrel primogen had heard him.

"We take care of our own," Cash replied. "I don't care what the Brujah would do, 'cause we Gangrel won't stand for this."

"There will be vengeance," Rayce promised, "but not tonight. We only need a week to get everyone familiar enough with these weapons to use them. We'll hit the Brotherhood first, then the Sons, ok?"

"Ok," Cash agreed, calming a bit.

"For now, though, get these two out somewhere and help them feed," Rayce said, gesturing to Jake and T.J. "They seem to have wounds they can't heal yet."

"Sure," Cash answered. He picked up Jake and carried him to the door, and was followed by T.J., who limped along as the result of a sword wound to the back of his left leg.

Rayce watched them as they went out, glad that he had been able to deflect Cash's reaction. The only way that their plan would work was if they were able to overwhelm each anarchy gang all at once, before they knew what was coming. If they had attacked that night, they would not have been able to get them all, and the Brotherhood would be able to prepare for the next time.

"Nice job," Carter said as he walked over to his sire. "We do have one more week, right?" he asked, making sure that the Gangrel primogen had agreed.

"Yes," Rayce affirmed. "Get them back to work, they have a lot to learn in a very short time," he continued as he gestured to the young kindred receiving instruction. He then walked outside, and climbed up onto the roof. He gazed at the stars, and looked to where he knew he would be able to see Saturn. Had he had a telescope, he would have been able to make the planet out far better, but his heightened senses quickly picked out the dull glow of the ringed gas giant hundreds of millions of miles away. In the Roman pantheon, Saturn had been the equivalent of the Greek god Cronus. Cronus had been the strongest of the Titans and the father of the Olympians. He had swallowed each of his children when they had been born, as he had feared that his offspring would turn on him as he had himself turned on his own father. Eventually Zeus, the greatest of the Olympians and

the youngest of Cronus' children, was able to vanquish his father and rescue his siblings, who had survived and grown within their father's stomach. Rayce wondered if this myth was what the Sons of Cronus had in mind when they named their clan. If so, he realized, it would explain a great deal. There were words on the street that the Sons of Cronus believed that their purpose was to destroy the elders of the kindred world, whom they believed were oppressing, even destroying, the younger generations. This was a thought that did not sit well with Rayce as he continued to ponder the situation.

CHAPTER 3

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I

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Robert Boccaccio sat at his desk, looking out the window at the streets of North Beach below. In only a week they had been able to convert the old haven of the Sons of Cronus into a well-furnished yet functional Tremere chantry. Now that the clan had finally settled in, the time had come to increase the pressure on the native kindred of San Francisco.

A soft knock on the door told Boccaccio that his childe had arrived promptly, as usual. "Come in," he muttered as he swiveled his chair around to face the entrance to the room. Solomon and Patrick both entered, dressed again all in black. They both sat down in the leather seats facing the front of the desk, and allowed Robert to begin the discussion.

"I hear the Sons of Cronus were successful in their assassination last night," Boccaccio began.

"Yes," Solomon responded indifferently. "John Valerio will no longer be exerting any influence in San Francisco." The mob boss had been the second mortal ally of the Brujah that the Tremere had had killed within the week. Four nights previously, they had also had their henchmen kill Robert Hawkins, the bookkeeper for the Santo family. Doubtlessly, the Brujah were working themselves up into a furor, and were about ready to take matters into their own hands. Julian would be unable to stop them, and once anarchy broke out, the Tremere would be able to subdue the city under their own power.

"Excellent," Boccaccio replied. "Patrick, what have the Brujah been up to?"

"No one knows," the young Tremere answered. "They haven't been on the streets in over a week. They'll have to surface pretty soon, though. They aren't the types to take this forever."

"No, they aren't" Boccaccio agreed with a smile, concealing his concern. It was unsettling that the Brujah were not to be found, but he was confident they would give up any restraint fairly soon. It was strange that the Brujah had held back any action for so long, already. Robert Boccaccio was unwilling to wait for the inevitable, though. He needed one last act to push them over the edge. "Solomon, what is the name of the club that the Brujah recently got their hands on?" Boccaccio asked.

"The Pierce Street Annex," Solomon replied, already knowing where this was leading.

"Do you wish to have us look there for the Brujah?" Patrick asked, not realizing the scope of action that Boccaccio was now considering. The elder almost frowned in response. Every time Patrick seemed ready to take over the reigns of the Tremere within a city, he would reveal his youth by playing things too simply. _This would have to be a lesson for the youngster_, Boccaccio decided.

"What would we gain by knowing where the Brujah are?" Boccaccio asked.

"We would be able to know for certain when they would be moving against the Sons," Patrick responded, now knowing that he had erred in his initial evaluation of their plans. He quickly turned the idea over in his mind a few times, searching for the answer that Solomon already seemed to have deduced.

"Control is the greatest commodity in the world, Patrick," Boccaccio said in a slightly condescending tone. "I know your sire has taught you this, why do you not remember? Why simply be able to learn of the Brujahs' action shortly before they take it when we can control that action, direct them toward a goal of our own choosing?"

The lights finally came on for Patrick as he suddenly felt he understood the plan that their primogen had in mind. "You plan to destroy the club," he said flatly.

"What advantage would that gain for us?" Robert asked, his tone slightly more approving.

"We would drive them over the edge almost instantly," Patrick responded. Although Boccaccio's tone had still been condescending, Patrick knew that he was correct in his assessment of the situation. He now needed only to explain his reasoning. It was the logic of the decision, more than the decision itself, that Boccaccio always stressed was the most important element with any choice. "We would know they would be coming for us almost immediately," Patrick continued. He did not reveal the satisfaction he felt in himself for the conclusion he had reached, but his sire did let a small smile slip.

"Excellent," Robert responded. "Where is Aaron?" He had hoped that Solomon's younger child, Aaron Heinberg, would have been able to sit in on this conversation. Apparently, he had been busy somewhere else.

"He is studying in the basement," Solomon replied. Boccaccio only nodded in response. Aaron had only been embraced some ten years ago, and still had much to learn about the ways of the Tremere. Within five to ten years, his studies of the Tremere thaumaturgical rituals would be complete, and he would be presented to the prince of the city where they resided at the time. That would introduce him formally to the kindred world. After that time, he would continue to apprentice for another five to ten years, learning the methods of the Tremere as Patrick now did. At the end of his schooling, he would be made primogen of the Tremere in one of the cities of western North America. Of course, it was too soon to tell for sure, but according

to the current hundred year plan, it seemed as if they would be in Minneapolis at the time Aaron was prepared.

"How would you handle the situation at hand?" Robert asked Patrick. He watched closely for any indication that Patrick was unsure, or confused by the problem. The young Tremere showed no uncertainty, but simply weighed the options in his head before answering.

"I would burn the place down, making it very obvious that it was arson," Patrick said coolly. "With a few good people dominated, we could have the authorities convinced that the Brujah burned the club down themselves, hoping to get away with the insurance money. There would be no payout by the insurance in such a situation. The Brujah would lose both their club, and the money that they had invested in it."

"Excellent thinking," Robert said. "You just made up for your previous error. Give instructions to the Sons of Cronus personally. You must now be seen more in the city. It will very shortly be yours."

"Yes sir," Patrick replied as he stood up and walked slowly out of the room. Inside he was ecstatic, knowing that he was now seen as a true adult in the eyes of his grandsire. Externally, though, he betrayed no emotion. He had become the true image of the Tremere.

Robert watched him go and smiled, and was joined by Solomon. They both knew that Patrick was ready, and that San Francisco had better beware.

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II

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Paul and Waggs looked at their weapons intently, both knowing that it was very likely they would be called upon to use them in the near future. The call had come five minutes ago from Hank that they would be torching the Pierce Street Annex later on that night. Both of these kindred knew exactly what that meant -- the Brujah would cease being passive. They would come at both of the anarch gangs for vengeance, and a bitter fight would follow. Each man knew the doubts that the other had about their ability to bring every member of the Brotherhood safely through such a battle.

"Do you really think we should do this?" Waggs asked, voicing the doubts that plagued his mind. "If we torch that club, the Brujah will come at us with everything they've got. I don't know if we can handle all of them."

"We won't have to," Paul answered absently as he looked over his nunchaku, searching for any scratches or cracks in the smooth wood. "The Sons will be right alongside us. If we can wipe out an entire clan within the city, the rest will back down."

"If you wipe out a clan, the others will all band together to destroy you," Sisyphus said as he entered. His grotesquely deformed features seemed to be made worse by the worry that now dominated his

expression. "The only ones that will gain by our war with the Brujah will be the Tremere. Can't you see that?" Whenever the old Nosferatu tried to explain the ways of the older kindred to his young charges, he felt as if he bore the same futile burden as the mythical Greek that he was named after. Sisyphus had betrayed the secrets of the gods and chained up Thanatos, the god of death, preventing the dead from reaching the underworld. As punishment, Sisyphus had been condemned by the god Hades to push a rock to the top of the mountain in the underworld. Only when the boulder was stable at the peak would he be allowed his freedom. The peak, however, was too narrow to ever allow the boulder to come to rest. The result was that Sisyphus would eternally push his boulder up one side of the mountain, only to have it immediately roll down the opposite side. The chore was the epitome of futility.

"If the Tremere win, we'll be able to stay in the city," Paul responded confidently. "They will remember their allies."

"We are not their ally, though," Sisyphus shot back, his voice almost desperate. He wished he could just pound the wisdom of the centuries into the head of his young anarch apprentice. "The allies of the Tremere are the Sons of Cronus. We are the allies of the Sons. Besides, the Tremere are untrustworthy, they'll probably wipe out the Sons anyway, claiming to end the anarch scourge within the city. The other clans will support them."

"There are only three Tremere, though," Paul answered, his confidence not waning in the least. "There are close to twenty anarchists. The warlocks wouldn't stand a chance. Even with the other clans, it wouldn't matter. Only the Brujah and Nosferatu can stand against us, and the Nosferatu never get involved. We'll be safe if we destroy the Brujah."

"You are a fool if you believe that. Besides, there are four Tremere," Sisyphus said.

"The fourth is just a child, he hasn't been released yet," Paul shot back. "He won't make a difference."

"Waggs, what do you think?" Sisyphus asked. "You can't believe that it could all be as easy as just killing a few Brujah."

"What I think doesn't matter," Waggs replied indifferently. "Our patron has called for this alliance, and until he orders us differently, we should abide by his commands. You both know that. This whole conversation is irrelevant."

"He's right," Paul said. "We can't go against the patron."

"He has his own agenda, Paul," Sisyphus pleaded. "Perhaps the time has come to move on. There is strength to be gained by not clinging to the patron."

"No, not yet," Paul said. "Perhaps someday, but I will not turn my back on our patron now."

"Neither will I," Waggs agreed.

"So be it," Sisyphus responded. "I will, of course, stand by my students in their time of need, but remember that I do not support

your decision."

Waggs and Paul simply nodded that they understood their mentor's position, and then went out in the main room to address the rest of the group. They would be leaving in two hours, and had many preparations to make before the attack commenced.

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III

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Julian sat in his mansion, gazing at the fire burning in his study's fireplace. He allowed himself to become lost in the dance of the flames, and would then attempt to find order in the seeming chaos of the blaze's pattern. Just a week earlier, his entire hold on the city had seemed in jeopardy as the Tremere entered the city. According to his reputation, Robert Boccaccio was famous for quickly taking a city over from the ruling prince. The Tremere had been strangely silent since coming into San Francisco, however. In fact, the only violence seemed to be anarch-related, as the Sons of Cronus increased the pressure on their Brujah rivals in the underworld.

"Would you like to talk about it?" Daedalus' soft yet powerful voice asked from the doorway.

"Yes, come in Daedalus," the prince answered from his chair. "I could use the company, if nothing else." The Nosferatu primogen had a knack for always showing up when Julian needed his counsel most. It had been that way for over a hundred years, and Julian knew that it would always remain the order of things.

Daedalus sat in the chair opposite Julian's, and turned it slightly away from the fireplace. The Nosferatu had never been able to fully overcome the innate fear that all kindred held toward fire. The mere sight of a lit match had been known to send some of the fledglings into a panic, and that fear almost always remained, at least to some degree. "What troubles you most, Julian? Is it the Tremere?" the Nosferatu primogen asked.

"Actually, no Daedalus," Julian responded grimly. "The Brujah have me far more worried."

"You mean their lack of a response to the attacks by the Sons," Daedalus said, finishing Julian's thought for him. "I once heard a saying that the worst thing one can hear is silence when the Brujah have been wronged."

"No one's even seen any of the Brujah during the last week," Julian replied. "Sasha hasn't come home, and Rayce and Cameron haven't even been seen at the new Brujah club. I would say I was concerned about their safety if I wasn't more worried about what they'll do when they resurface."

"I know the Gangrel have been absent for the most part as well," Daedalus said. "Only Cash has been seen on the streets, and only twice during the past week. You don't think that there could be a connection, do you?"

"The Gangrel frequently disappear for weeks at a time," Julian pointed out. "Their absence doesn't concern me as much. Besides, Cash probably just has his clan locked away somewhere so he can teach them how to defend themselves. They have a threat of their own to deal with."

"I thought you said that was not how we were going to deal with the problem," Daedalus said, his voice betraying a slight bit of concern. As was to be expected, he was in no hurry to take part in an action that could endanger the Masquerade.

"I'm beginning to wonder," Julian said. "The anarchs keep getting more and more entrenched in the city, despite my best efforts. I think we may have to exterminate them after all."

"Please wait on that," Daedalus requested. "We could try to get them to go to war with each other first to soften them both up a bit. Our losses wouldn't be as heavy. Remember, we don't have the soldiers for a full war."

Julian nodded in agreement. Daedalus was right, of course. There was more at risk than the Masquerade. Both of these anarch gangs had been in battle, and that would give them a great edge over the fledglings Julian would bring into the fray. "What about the Tremere?" Julian asked, wanting to change the subject.

"They will act as they wish, as they always have," Daedalus responded noncommittally.

"They've been too quiet as well," Julian said, his voice betraying his concern. "They're up to something, and I have no way of knowing what it is."

"None have ever been able to understand the warlocks," Daedalus replied. "Despite a lack of understanding, many princes have succeeded in holding their cities despite the best attempts of the Tremere. You may yet prevail, do not worry yourself."

Julian found himself pondering his problems again, and found that he would much rather discuss the anarchs once again. Despite the fact that he did not care for thinking about the problems they caused, it was better than dealing with the sinking, foreboding feeling that the Tremere evoked within him. "Do you think I should let Matt go at the anarchs?" Julian asked his friend. "He's been champing at the bit to kill them off."

"I think it is the way of his clan," Daedalus responded. "They thrive in wartime, but seem to lack direction when there is peace. He is still young, and may be overzealous in his attack. It could risk the Masquerade."

"Do you think he would have a chance of success, though?" Julian asked.

"He is one of the strongest left within the city," Daedalus answered matter-of-factly, surprising his friend. Julian had always thought of Matt as young, and not ready to pose too great a threat. "If Matt could not succeed, then I doubt any of us could without being very hard-pressed," Daedalus added. The Nosferatu sat back in the chair,

his claws slightly digging into the leather. "Perhaps you should allow him to make preparations."

"You mean lift the ban on weapons?" Julian asked. His surprise was obvious, as it had been Daedalus who had pushed hardest for the restriction of modern weaponry in the city.

"I was being an idealist fool, Julian," the Nosferatu responded. "Pacifism has never worked. All throughout history it has only served to weaken one side and make it more vulnerable to an aggressor. Lift the ban, before it's too late."

"At once," Julian said, smiling. While he had been in favor of their attempt at peace, it had never sat well with him. His violent past had risen up in protest to the peaceful notions that his present self was attempting to foster within the city. He knew in his heart that allowing the clans to arm themselves was the correct course of action, despite the fact that he knew it would undoubtedly lead to increased violence. He just hoped he would be able to control the carnage. "I will tell Matt, and have him inform the others. I'm going to find Caitlin, Daedalus. I need to get away from all of this for awhile."

Daedalus nodded in understanding, and then got up from his seat. He would spend this night in the sewers, among his clan. He needed to assure them that any violence would be brief, and that they would not be at risk of being exposed to the mortals. He hoped that he would be telling them the truth.

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IV

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Rayce, Cash, and Cameron watched as the members of the Brotherhood of the Holy Fist made their last preparations for the planned attack on the Pierce Street Annex, unaware of what the target of the anarchists' attack was to be. True to his word, Rayce had allowed for the enemies of the Gangrel to be the first victims of the new alliance between the Gangrel and the Brujah. Cameron had been against their choice for an initial victim, as he had feared that the Gangrel would abandon them once their own enemy had been defeated. In the end though, there was no avoiding the attack that they were about to launch against the anarchist gang that had set up shop in the Mission District.

"What do you think?" Cash asked the two Brujah that were next to him. Each looked through binoculars at the building from across the street, weighing every action of the enemy.

"Looks like they're ready for us," Cameron answered. All of the members of the Brotherhood carried weapons, and paced back and forth as if they expected the impending attack.

"No," Rayce put in. "I think they're ready to come out after us. If they're leaving, we'd be better off to wait for them out here and jump them when they come out. We can follow them in later."

"Sure as hell beats trying to sneak in," Cash said. "We don't know whether the place is booby-trapped or not."

"Get everyone ready, then, Rayce," Cameron ordered, taking charge of the situation. His second in command took off toward the others, all of whom were waiting in two vans across the street from the Brotherhood's haven. Within a matter of minutes Rayce had implemented Cameron and Cash's plan and had everyone in place, while Carter kept an eye on things for them from a rooftop a few buildings away. From his vantage point he would be able to pick off anarchs in the front, back, and left side of their building. Carter grinned as he thought about what his phosphorous-tipped tracer rounds would do to the anarchs.

The preparations had been completed just in time, as the Brotherhood emerged from the front door only moments later. Rayce stood next to Cameron, leveling his MAC-10 at the doorway. No one would fire until Carter opened up, as they wanted to make sure that their sniper got a few good shots before the anarchs were able to take cover from his deadly barrage. No sooner had he thought about Carter than the sound of a slightly muffled gunshot rang softly through the street. A flash of light streamed down through Donny's head, then was followed by two more through his chest. The kindred's body collapsed to the ground, completely lifeless. The rest of the Brotherhood froze for a brief second, like a deer caught in a car's headlights, and then started to run for cover. For Tim, the delay cost him his life. Bright streaks from more tracer bullets tore through his body as he ducked behind a car. A second later the rest of the members of the two clans opened up with their weapons.

The attack would have to be quick, Cameron knew, if they were to escape cleanly before the cops showed up. Unfortunately, Julian had had the police increase patrols in the neighborhood, so they would arrive within a couple of minutes. He ordered his Brujah to rush the building, and they all followed his command, reloading their weapons as they ran toward the Brotherhood's haven. The Gangrel were right behind them, Theo's brood covering the rest with gunfire at the windows above them.

Rayce was the first inside the building, and was met immediately by two of the anarchs. He leveled his MAC-10 at Wes and fired, knocking the Ravnos back about ten feet as he emptied half the clip into his body. Vlad was able to disarm the Brujah before he could bring the Tzimisce to bear, and the young anarch attempted to drive a stake through Rayce's heart. Only the superior reflexes born from years of combat saved the Rayce from being disabled. As it was, he was wounded terribly as the stake sank into his shoulder.

Rayce then was pushed aside by Cash as the Gangrel primogen entered the building, followed closely by Sasha. Cash set upon Vlad in an instant, but was knocked to the ground almost immediately as Waggs showed up with a shotgun and opened fire on the attackers. Sasha and Rayce were able to find cover, but Cash was hit three more times as he struggled to get out of Waggs' field of fire. Both Vlad and Wes were able to retreat under the cover of their packmate, though Wes was no longer able to heal the wounds he had suffered from Rayce's attack, as the damage was just too great.

The Brujah Mark, and his childe, Daria, were the next ones through the door. Dodging shots from Waggs, they were able to pull Cash to safety, and Sasha was able to breathe a sigh of relief. "Stay here," Rayce commanded Sasha as he got to his feet. In the moments they had

been ducking under cover he had been able to remove the stake and heal his wound. He now allowed his blood to power his movements as he raced across the room toward Waggs, brandishing the stake he had withdrawn from his shoulder. His movement was impossibly fast, beyond any speed a mortal could have hoped to achieve. The young anarch tried to shoot the approaching Brujah, but was unprepared for the speed of his foe. Rayce was upon Waggs before he could even get off a well-aimed shot. The anarch pulled out the gladius that had served him so well before in combat, and thrust the weapon forward at Rayce. The old Brujah proved faster, however, as he sidestepped the short sword, and drove the stake through Waggs' back. The stake went through the anarch's heart and emerged from his chest, causing Waggs to enter torpor, the involuntary paralysis/sleep that often meant certain death for a vampire. In one smooth motion, Rayce grabbed the gladius from his defeated opponent's hand, and took the head from the kindred, ending his life.

"There's a van in the back, Rayce, they're all making a run to get away," Rayce heard Carter report from across the street. "I can't get a shot at them, there's some kind of overhang in the way. You guys'll have to do it." Rayce grinned quickly, knowing the investment in the two-way radio had not been a waste.

"They're going out the back, let's go," he shouted to the others in the building. Cash, Sasha, Mark, and Daria all took off after him as they raced through a hallway toward the back exit.

In the front of the building, Cameron started to load the rest of the Gangrel and Brujah into the vans. He had heard the message, and wanted to have everyone ready to pursue if the Brotherhood should escape the building. He quickly ordered Rica and Bottle Rocket to go into the building to back up the others, and then had Theo take the wheel of one van. Boris, Rayce's second childe, was already behind the wheel of their other vehicle. "Uh oh, cops," Cameron heard Carter say from his rooftop perch. "We'd better get going."

At that moment the anarchs' van tore out around the side of the building. As the van reached the street, the side door was thrown open and Kenny leveled an AK-47 at Cameron, and opened fire. The Brujah primogen was able to duck to cover just in time to avoid being cut to ribbons by automatic fire from the assault rifle. Kenny, however, was not lucky enough to avoid Carter's flawless aim. The Brujah sniper put five rounds in the anarch before he realized he had even been shot, and Kenny's body was hurled out of the van as the vehicle made a sharp left turn, the anarchs hoping to avoid the approaching police.

"Oh my God, they killed Kenny!" Paul shouted, furious at the murder of his first childe. "You bastards!" He was seething with anger as he turned to his packmates. "We have to go back and get them! They can't get away with that!"

Sisyphus tackled his apprentice in the back of the van, using his blood to increase his strength so he could control the young kindred. "They won't, Paul. I promise!"

"Where the hell are we going?" Wes yelled from the driver's seat, curious as to where he should be driving.

"Chinatown," Paul answered. "It's time to get the help of our

allies." Paul pulled a cell-phone out of his pocket and dialed the number that Hank had given him for emergencies. There was not even a full ring before Hank answered the call.

"Who is this?" he asked aggressively. The leader of the Sons of Cronus was not accustomed to people calling him on his emergency-only line.

"It's Paul," the anarch answered.

"Where are you?" Hank returned. "We've been waiting for you guys for fifteen minutes."

"The fucking Gangrel and Brujah teamed up against us tonight! "They totally shot the hell out of our haven."

"What?" Hank asked in disbelief. The thought that the Gangrel and Brujah would unite their clans against the anarchs had never occurred to him. He had only counted on fighting the Brujah. "Where the hell are you?" he asked, his anxiety building up with every second.

"On the way to Chinatown. I was hoping to meet up with you guys," Paul answered, quickly starting to feel panic set in.

"Shit, they found us," Wes yelled from the driver's seat. "They're right behind us!"

"We're on our way," Hank answered. "Just try to hold them off until we get there. You'll find weapons in the closet at the top of the stairs on the second floor. Feel free to use them."

"Right!" Hank yelled in return. As he put the phone back in his pocket, bullets cut through the back and left side of the van. Wes slammed on the brakes, and Paul could see one of the vans with the Brujah and Gangrel race past. Wes hit the gas again, and turned quickly down a sidestreet. _We'll be lucky to last long enough to get to Chinatown,_ Paul thought to himself, _and it's even a very long trip._

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Even as he began to give up hope, Wes turned another corner, and they were in Chinatown. Moments later he slammed on the brakes again, and stopped the van on the sidewalk outside the haven of the Sons of Cronus. "Get out, last stop!" the Ravnos yelled as he vacated the front seat. He pulled out his Uzi and started firing at the second van that had been following them as it pulled up to a halt. The back door of the other van opened, and Theo's brood jumped out, firing at the members of the Brotherhood. Wes took a couple of hits and collapsed to the ground, his body no longer able to absorb damage. Sisypheus reached him, though, and pulled the Ravnos to safety inside the building as Vlad and Paul raced inside, hoping to break out the Sons' weapons in time.

Paul reached the closet first, and yanked the door clean off the hinges in his haste to get to the weapons that would help stave off the death of his pack for a few extra minutes. What he found inside brought a wide smile to his face. The walk-in closet revealed several shotguns, AK-47's, automatic pistols and revolvers, and a mini-gun. Stopping for a brief moment to drool over the mini-gun, he decided to

pass on the imposing weapon due to the fact that he did not know how to use it. He grabbed an AK-47 and two extra clips, and handed them to Vlad, and then took out another one of the assault rifles and as many clips as he could hold. The two anarchists raced to the street-facing windows on the second floor, and immediately began to fire down at the Brujah and Gangrel below. Under the cover provided by their packmates, Sisyphus and Wes were able to make their way into the building.

Outside, Theo and his brood took cover from the shower of bullets being rained down by Paul and Vlad. "Be patient," Cameron called out to them from the back of the van. "The others will be here any minute, and then we can rush the place." Cameron just hoped that Rayce and the others in the second van would arrive before the police did. They would need a couple of minutes to dispose of the Brotherhood. From the fact that only two shooters were firing at them, Cameron deduced that the Sons of Cronus were not at their haven, and that they would be able to easily overwhelm the four kindred that stood against them.

Moments later, the second van arrived, but as soon as Rayce, Cash, and the others poured out of the back of the vehicle, two more assault rifles opened up on them. Sisyphus and Wes were firing from the first floor windows while Paul and Vlad continued from above. "I wish we had the Telemon here with us," Rayce said to Cameron as he joined him hiding behind the first van. "That grenade launcher Matt has would come in really handy right now."

"We don't need help from those grunts," Cameron shot back. "We can handle this just fine." He scanned the rooftops around, and then asked, "Is Carter getting in position?"

"We had to leave him behind," Cash yelled over the gunfire. "He couldn't make it down to the vans before the cops showed up. He'll be fine, though. Even if they catch him, he's a cop â€" he could say he was responding to the shooting himself." Cameron just nodded in response.

Over the gunfire they heard the sound of approaching police sirens, and all three knew that they would have to act immediately or risk losing the golden opportunity that had been presented to them. Rayce was the first to move, using every bit of his vampiric ability to power his movement. He was a blur as he raced toward the front of the building. Neither Cash nor Cameron had ever seen anyone, even a kindred, move at the rate of speed that Rayce had achieved. One bullet hit the Brujah as he moved across the street, but it was not even enough to make him break his stride. He flashed through the front door and moments later the gunshots stopped emanating from the first floor. Gunfire could be heard inside, though, and that was enough motivation to send Theo's brood, Cash, Cameron, and Mark on their way toward the building. Behind them, Sasha, Rica, Bottle Rocket, Lance, T.J., and Jake took up positions to hold off the police as long as possible.

The first ones on the scene were Frank and Sonny, and they flew out of their police cruiser just as Rica and Bottle Rocket turned it into Swiss cheese. "Lay down your weapons and go home!" Sonny yelled. "The prince has forbidden this type of violence." Even as he spoke, he knew that the kindred would never listen. He looked on in shock as he realized that the Gangrel and the Brujah were actually working

together in this strike. From the surprised look on Frank's face, Sonny knew that his mortal partner did not know what to make of the situation either.

The Brujah and Gangrel continued to fire at the two policemen, but it was meant more as a warning than as an actual attack. They all recognized Sonny as being the prince's childe, and no one wanted to accidentally kill him. They also knew that Julian protected Frank, and his death would also bring dire consequences. From behind the policemen came new gunfire, though, and this was aimed to kill. The Sons of Cronus had arrived, and advanced quickly, firing their Uzis and AK-47's at anything that moved. Before he knew what hit him, Frank had been shot three times, and was lying on the ground in a growing pool of his own blood. Sonny was also put down, as he threw himself on top of his partner and absorbed the five bullets that would have instantly killed the mortal. Sasha, Rica, and Lance, all taken by surprise, were also put down quickly, and the Sons raced past their fallen foes, more interested in saving their allies than in destroying their enemies. Hank knew that there were plenty more kindred inside attacking what was left of the Brotherhood.

Hank raced into his clan's haven, immediately tripping on Max's decapitated body as he stepped through the door. The young Gangrel seemed to have had his head blown into a thousand fragments from a shotgun blast. As soon as Hank entered, Cort, one of Theo's Gangrel, attacked him. He sidestepped the knife thrust from the fledgling, and then unloaded a clip from his AK-47. The damage done to Cort was too great for even his undead body to endure, and he was destroyed. The Sons began to pour in, attacking the Brujah and Gangrel all throughout the building. Hank and Sam darted from one room to another, hoping that they would be lucky enough to find the primogen of one of the two clans that were attacking them. To kill a primogen would be a great victory. Instead, they found Rayce. The Brujah drew his katana as he streaked across the room toward the two Sons. Hank managed to use his rifle to parry the first strike from his attacker, but Rayce ducked down and swung low in a second strike, hamstringing the leader of the Sons of Cronus, effectively disabling him. Sam tried to protect her leader, but had her head separated from her shoulders before she could even raise a defense. Before Rayce could finish off Hank, though, Vlad, who had snuck into the room during the commotion, attacked him from behind. The Tzimisce grew his hands into claws and raked across Rayce's back, digging deep into his flesh. Hank, seeing the opportunity to escape, fled the room as quickly as possible, leaving the two combatants to finish each other off.

Despite his best efforts Rayce could not shake Vlad from his back, and the anarch dug deeper and deeper, intent on reaching the Brujah's heart and pulling it out. Before Vlad could succeed, though, he felt something grab him by the throat from behind. He was yanked from Rayce's back and thrown to the floor, and saw that Cash had arrived to take part in the melee. The Gangrel primogen had also grown claws, and he used them to great effect to rip out the throat of the Tzimisce. He then set upon the anarch with his fangs, and drank every drop of the anarch's blood, which he would use to give himself the power to destroy more of his own enemies. Rayce looked down at the anarch that Cash had sent into torpor, and cut down with his sword, taking off his head. Rayce and Cash looked at each other for an awkward moment, and then ran out separate exits from the room.

Gunfire still erupted from a few places in the building, but now mostly the sounds of weapons clanging off of each other could be heard along with screams from the wounded. The building filled with light as a police helicopter arrived, and the sound of sirens filled the air as more squad cars showed up. Rayce analyzed the situation quickly in his mind, and decided that the best course of action would be to leave. The police would doubtless bring SWAT with them for this situation, and none of the kindred were in shape to take a beating like the one that a special weapons team would inflict upon them. Rayce ran into Cameron on the stairs, and yelled up to him, "We'd better get going."

"I already called for a withdrawal," the Brujah primogen responded. "We're on our way out. You'll have to make your own way back to the Annex, we're all meeting up back there." Rayce nodded in response, and then took off. He could hear gunshots from outside coming from the police that were trying to stop the kindred from fleeing the scene of the crime, but he doubted that they would meet with much success. They would probably all be able to flee to fight another day.

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V

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"Enter," Boccaccio said in response to the knock on his study door. Solomon, Patrick, and Aaron all came in, Patrick and Solomon sitting in the chairs in front of Boccaccio's desk. Aaron stood a few feet behind the other two. It was not yet his place to enter into the conversations that determined the course of action of the clan. There would be a chance for that when he finally completed his magical studies. For now his role was that of observer. He was expected only to watch and learn, so that he could draw on this debate at a future time, to better guide his own city when he should receive it.

Boccaccio looked across the room at the grandfather clock standing in the corner, and gave an almost imperceptible nod to himself. "It has been exactly an hour since Hank Williams, the leader of the clan that has been performing as our soldiers, advised us that the Brujah and Gangrel had united against both anarchy gangs. The Brotherhood of the Holy Fist apparently escaped with only three of their number, while the Sons of Cronus lost three of their own. By all accounts, the Brujah and the Gangrel each only lost one."

"Such is the advantage of superior numbers," Solomon said softly.

"Yes," Boccaccio responded. "The attack was efficient, at least by the standards of either one of those clans. Of course, that means that while they eliminated a large number of their opponents, they also undertook the action with a subtlety that allowed the entire West Coast to know what was going on. An hour from now, there will be a meeting of the primogen to discuss the events of this evening. A situation has arisen in Boulder, and I have been ordered to leave sooner than I had expected. Thus, this will be the last meeting that I will sit in on as the primogen of the Tremere." He looked over to

Patrick with a smile. "At the meeting after this one, I will announce that you will be taking my place as primogen. It is unlikely we will gain the city by then, so the taking of San Francisco will be your responsibility."

"I understand, grandsire," Patrick responded.

"Now, however, the matter is what we will say about this attack by the Brujah and Gangrel," Boccaccio said, returning to the subject at hand. "What do either of you have to say?"

"They endanger the Masquerade, and have gone against the edicts of the prince," Patrick stated, trying to put the actions of the two primogen into the proper legal context. "My understanding is that the primogen of both clans should be put to death."

"That vote will never take place," Boccaccio said. "Of the five primogen that would vote, I can almost assure you that Matt would not vote against a primogen that took direct action. I think Lillie would join me in not wanting to hold a primogen responsible for actions that were undertaken in the defense of the clan's territory, so they would probably survive."

"So the question becomes what we should do about the anarchs," Patrick responded. "Do we believe there is a danger of the other clans discovering that we were the ones inciting the anarchs to action?"

"They may suspect it, but they will have no proof," Boccaccio replied slyly. "We have only dealt directly with Hank, and if he is to be killed, he would rather have the other clans do it than face death at the hands of the Tremere after betraying us." Boccaccio smiled slightly, enjoying how useful the warlocks' reputation for cruelty could be.

"So do we continue to push for leniency toward the anarchs?" Patrick asked.

"You tell me," Boccaccio said, enjoying this one last test of Patrick's ability to analyze a problem.

"If we push for them to be destroyed, the others may suspect that we were working with the anarchs, and want them destroyed to cover our tracks," Patrick answered, seeming to choose his words as carefully as ever. "If we push for leniency, they may suspect that we wish to keep them around as pawns. I would say hold tight and see which way the wind blows, and join the majority side of the vote. That way we could not be accused of planning anything that the other clans might also have been considering."

"Excellent," Boccaccio said. "That is exactly how it will be played."

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VI

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Julian glared at every one of the primogen around the table. He knew

that one of them was responsible for an attack that had begun in the Mission District and then raged on into Chinatown. Several of the city's anarchists had been killed, but so had a number of mortals that had gotten too close to the action. Many other mortals had also been injured quite severely. One of these mortals was Frank Kohaneck, the policeman he had been sworn to protect. Of course, Julian assumed that Sonny knew who had been behind the assault, but his child was at the hospital at Frank's side and could not be reached. The prince was left with the responsibility of discovering for himself who was behind the violence that night.

What angered him most was that he had been with Caitlin when he had found out. In fact, he had learned about the attack from her when one of her reporters had called her to tell her about it. That would have been seen as fairly inept leadership had any of the other primogen found out. Now, however, he would vent his anger on the one who was guilty.

"Ok, which one of you did it?" he asked venomously. He looked at all of the primogen save Daedalus, who had been in his company at the time of the firefight. Without hesitation, Cameron stood up.

"The Brujah were avenging themselves upon the anarchists for the murders of our allies, Valerio and Hawkins. The attack was just." Cameron stood glaring at Julian with an intensity that equaled that of the prince. A moment later Cash also stood.

"We also took part in the attack," the Gangrel primogen said. "The Brotherhood was becoming a threat to the Gangrel, so we joined the Brujah in destroying the interlopers."

"Both of you?" Julian asked, not able to hide his shock. He had never considered the possibility that two clans could have worked together to pull off an attack of this magnitude without him ever getting wind of it before it happened. From the look of the other primogen, no one else had thought it likely, either. Besides, the Brujah and Gangrel had been at war in San Francisco since the two clans had been in the city. It was tradition. Now, that familiar, predictable tradition had apparently been abandoned.

Julian had expected to call for the death of the violator of his edict, but with two primogen standing accused, that was no longer a viable option. Even if he could get the vote past the conclave, and he doubted he could, he would be creating a power vacuum in the two most unstable clans in the city. More violence would doubtlessly follow. He realized that he would have to let them both go unpunished, but to do so would greatly undercut his authority. He needed a way out. When he saw Daedalus sitting staring at him, Julian noted that the look on the Nosferatu's face was saying that the answer was obvious. Then Julian realized he had an out, after all.

"Normally, you would both be put to death," Julian said, his voice carrying the authority that he had grown accustomed to wielding. "However, earlier this evening I rescinded the weapons ban on the kindred of the city. I am sure that you were aware of this when you undertook your action, which as Cameron said was just according to kindred law." He glanced at the other primogen, and could see no visible reaction coming from them. He continued. "The matter will be considered closed, but both of you keep in mind that if you ever were

to step out of bounds in such a manner, I would have you both extinguished without a moment's hesitation. I would not necessarily need the approval of the other primogen to carry out the sentence, either. Do you understand?" Julian's voice had deepened ominously as he asked the question, and everyone at the table knew that the threat was understood.

None of the primogen were fooled by Julian's leniency, as they all saw it as a political necessity. In order to hold power, he was forced to accept a reduction in his authority, at least for the time being. Cash was relieved when he heard Julian speak, though. After the fiasco that had occurred in Chinatown, he had fully expected to be sentenced to final death. Now, however, he was more loyal to his prince than ever before, as Julian had given the Gangrel primogen back his life. Cameron was satisfied in the result, which was not far off from his predictions. He had known that if everything that could go wrong did, having another primogen involved in the plot would benefit him. As it turned out, everything had gone wrong, and he was saved as a result of his scheming.

In the minute of silence that followed Julian's speech, all of the primogen at one time or another looked at Cameron, realizing that the Brujah clan had in fact changed. While it was true that the rabble had predictably gone against Julian's edict, they had been able to work with another clan in order to achieve their end. More significantly, they had worked with the Gangrel, their longtime nemeses in San Francisco. The Brujah would definitely be moving up in the level of respect that they would be receiving in the city.

"With all of that settled," Julian started up again, "I am forced to once again raise the issue of the anarchs. Does anyone have any ideas as to how to deal with their presence?"

"Clan Telemon once again offers to destroy the anarchs for you," Matt said evenly.

"It will be considered," Julian replied. He looked around the table at the others.

"No, Julian," Cameron protested. "The anarchs are the problem of the Brujah and the Gangrel. We want to finish what we started."

"With all due respect, Cameron, I would prefer you stop now while the city is still intact," Julian answered with a touch of sarcasm. "However, I do appreciate you taking the responsibility to deal with your own affairs. Too many times your predecessor tried to get the other clans to solve his problems for him." Julian felt the words of support were appropriate. While he was truly furious about the actions that Cash and Cameron had taken, he wanted to foster the cooperation that the Brujah seemed to have recently espoused.

"I believe that we should still attempt to maintain the peace," Daedalus said. He knew no one in his clan would enjoy going to war. They would never risk themselves in breaking the Masquerade just to extinguish a few anarchs.

"No, I'm sorry Daedalus," Julian replied. "I think the time for action has finally arrived. How long would it take you to rearm yourselves and launch an attack against the anarchs, Matt?"

"We could be ready by tomorrow at midnight," Matt answered. He looked around the table, and saw the anger on Cameron's face. The Brujah primogen truly resented being cut out of the action. "We would need to ask a favor of the Brujah, however," he added.

"What?" Cameron asked angrily. Not only was the upstart taking the honor of ridding the city of the Brujah's enemies, but now he asked favors from the clan which had the greatest right to this battle.

"We would like to request the aid of Carter," Matt said. "By all accounts, he's an excellent shot. We'll need a sniper." He hoped that this would be enough of a show of friendship toward the Brujah for Cameron to not hold too great a grudge.

"He's all yours," Cameron said, hardly able to conceal his satisfaction. A Brujah would be taking part in the next attack, just as he felt one should. The Brujah would not be completely cut out after all.

"Then is anyone opposed?" Julian asked.

"As long as only Telemon and the Brujah Carter take part in this attack, the Nosferatu will follow our prince," Daedalus said, hoping the young but experienced kindred would be able to keep their activities quiet. All of the others were also in agreement with Julian's strategy.

"Then this meeting is at an end," Julian said.

"Not quite," Boccaccio stated quickly. The other primogen, who had already been halfway out of their chairs and on their way out suddenly turned to see the Tremere primogen still seated, looking as though he owned all of them. "Clan Tremere would like to make it clear that we are well aware of your recent inability to control the Brujah and Gangrel clans," Boccaccio said with a smile, not wanting to play the fool to Luna's ploy to save face. "We hope that this was an anomaly. If such failures of leadership continue in the future, our clan may not be willing to follow you. The prince should be able to control the clans in order to maintain the peace. Violence like that which took place tonight must not become a frequent occurrence. It endangers the Masquerade."

"You will not need to worry about that," Julian answered calmly. He had hoped, foolishly he now saw, that he would be able to escape this meeting without having the Tremere call his leadership into question. The worst part was that he knew they were right.

The primogen did file out, though, and Julian was left alone at the table, thinking about how close they had come that day to losing everything that had been built in this city. They would have to be extremely discreet in the future, and he hoped that Matt's small clan would be up to the task.

CHAPTER 4

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Sonny walked into Frank's room slowly, making sure that the nurse had pulled the curtains across the windows like he had asked. He had not been up and about in the middle of the afternoon since the day before he was embraced. He had had no choice, however, since he had waited around the hospital until after Frank had come out of surgery. He needed to know that his partner would be okay, and the doctors had not been able to determine Frank's chances until well into the morning. By that time, the sun was up and Sonny was stuck in the hospital. He had been told that Frank was conscious again, though, so now he went in to speak with his partner. He looked the mortal over, and the thought struck him that he had never seen Frank look so bad. His skin was pale, and he was visibly in pain as he turned to look at Sonny.

"So how are you feeling?" Frank asked the Ventrue as he walked into the room.

"Really tired," Sonny answered. "We're not supposed to be up during the day. I feel like I'm ready to collapse."

"You look it," Frank replied, trying to muster a smile. "No bullet holes in you though, huh?"

"No, I healed them hours ago," Sonny replied.

"I've decided to let you embrace me Sonny," Frank said flatly. "I want a few weeks first, though. I want to heal up, and then enjoy the sunrise and sunset a few more times. I want to get one last tan, at least without the fear of busting into flames. I want to enjoy the daylight as much as I can before I give it up forever."

"Ok Frank," Sonny said, smiling. "Whenever you want, just let me know. Is that it?" he asked as he moved toward the door.

"Yeah, thanks," Frank said. He closed his eyes and tried to get back to sleep, knowing he needed it even more than the Ventrue did.

Outside, as Sonny walked down the hall into the waiting room, he smiled broadly. He would soon have his first child, and he was certain that Frank would be a success in the kindred world. With the addition of another police officer, the Ventrue clan would bring another capable warrior into the fold, which would help maintain their status in the city, especially given the fact that the other clans were largely populated by fledglings.

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II

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Hank looked through the ruins of what had once been his study, and longed for the money to be able to repair the damage that had been done to his clan's haven. They had staked out the area for a few hours, waiting for the police that were watching the building to finally leave, which they eventually had done. His clan now sifted through the debris, everyone hoping to gather up items that were

important. In their concentration on the task at hand, they were unaware of the black Hummer that drove up the street past the building, and which stopped on the corner.

Matt, his childe, Holden, and Carter all got out of the vehicle quickly. Carter was carrying Matt's Barret 82A1 .50 Cal. sniper rifle and H&K 40mm grenade launcher, and he quickly went into a building across the street from the Sons' haven in order to take up a sniper position. Matt and Holden both went into a building on the same side of the street as the haven, but a few doors up. They went up to the roof and began to travel across the rooftops, moving toward the roof of the building that the Sons of Cronus were currently in.

Inside the building, Hank kept allowing recent memories to come back to him. At this time last night, his entire clan had still been alive. They had lost Sam, Marco, and Alex during the attack, and he was not even sure that they had been able to inflict any losses on the Gangrel and Brujah beyond the one he had killed himself when he had entered. He considered whether the time had come to leave San Francisco. As he dwelt on the folly of his goals, all of the dreams that he had only a week before suddenly seemed completely unrealistic.

"Don't get down on yourself, boss," Barb said as she walked in. "There was no way to predict what would have happened. The Tremere set us up. We'll just have to destroy them, that's all."

"Older, larger, and stronger clans than ours have been destroyed trying to go to war with the Tremere," Hank answered, referring to the ancient feud between the Tremere and Tzimisce. "We'd be better off cutting our losses and getting out of this city while we still have a clan left."

Across the street, Carter turned on the rifle's night vision scope. Two minutes alone with the rifle and he was already in love. He made a mental note to ask Matt later if the Telemon would be able to get another one of the weapons. He watched as Matt and Holden made their way into the building across the street from him, and he began to scan the windows. He was not to take part in the attack unless things started to go wrong. Discretion was the goal, and a .50 Cal. rifle was not generally very discreet.

"You in position?" Matt asked over the com channel as he and Holden entered the building.

"Right with you," Carter replied. "The head honcho is in his office, one floor below you. There's another one in the room with him. On the fourth floor, you have two men in the front room, both looking like they're packing up. I can't see anyone else, the windows are painted over."

"Thanks," Matt replied. He and Holden moved into the building, and quietly made their way toward the front room that Carter had mentioned. The lights were out in the building, but Matt allowed his eyes to fully adjust to the darkness, permitting him to see despite the lack of light. He saw the red glow of Holden's eyes that let him know his childe was also using a vampire's night vision. Matt saw Billy and Mickey packing a pair of duffel bags, and he was able to get in the room without them turning to see him enter. He fired three quick shots at each of their heads with his MP5, which had an

attached silencer. Both kindred fell to the ground, and he went up to the bodies and cut each of the heads off with one quick, powerful stroke from his survival knife.

Out in the hall, Holden used similar tactics against Duane and Tass, who came out of their room when they heard the thud of Billy and Mickey hitting the floor. "We've got four gone," Holden said into the com.

"I think the others might have heard you," Carter answered from across the street. "Hank and the woman who's with him just dove for cover from the window. They might have heard the bodies land on the floor or something."

A loud scream came from the end of the hall as Erica reached the top of the stairs and found Matt and Holden standing in the hallway over the decapitated bodies of two of her clanmates. Matt raised his weapon and fired, hitting her three times in the back as she dove down the stairs. Holden was also able to hit her, shooting out the young kindred's left knee.

Across the street, Carter started looking for a shot. Now that the Sons of Cronus knew they were here, he figured he might as well start shooting. The rifle was somewhat silenced, so it was unlikely there would be any immediate police response. Besides, Julian had had the cops called off from this neighborhood for the next few hours to arrange for this job, so any called-in response that might be coming would not arrive anytime in the near future.

Erica tumbled down the stairs, and got up and hobbled to the door to Hank's study. "How many of them are there?" he yelled as she came running into the study. She was never able to answer, as a bullet tore through the front window, into her chest, and left a six-inch hole in her back, spraying her heart out of her torso and smearing it on the wall behind her. Erica's corpse hit the floor as Barb screamed. She wanted vengeance for her lover's death. Hank kept his cool, though. He shot out the glass, and then turned to Barb. "We're going out the window. He's probably not going to be able to get both of us, so if he gets me, go to the corner outside Chan's Grocery, right down the street. I have a Camaro parked there. The keys are under the front seat. Just take off."

Barb nodded that she understood, and the two of them jumped out the window just as Matt and Holden reached the room. They fired at the two jumping kindred, but only managed to cause flesh wounds. Carter was the one with the better shot, and he took it. His first shot round half of Barb's abdomen against the front of the building as she fell. The second shot was rushed, though. He managed only to shoot off Hank's left arm at the elbow, as well as cause some damage to the kindred's torso. The anarchy kept running, however, and was soon out of Carter's field of fire. As Hank reached the Camaro, he looked back up the street at his home one last time. Matt and Holden were standing at the shattered window, but had lowered their guns. On the street, though, Hank noticed Barb's body slowly stirring. She was still alive. He felt his heart actually start to beat with the excitement he was feeling.

Matt and Holden watched as Hank got into the car and started it up. Neither one was going to risk firing his weapon into the open. If a bullet were to ricochet unexpectedly, they could end up wounding a

mortal, and Julian had been adamant in his instructions that mortals not be endangered. Besides, there was also the Masquerade to think about. Police investigation of the street violence had to cease, or they would all be at risk.

To the surprise of both Telemon, Hank turned his car back up the street toward them, instead of fleeing as they had expected. "No more shooting," Matt instructed Carter. "We don't want to cause another incident." All three watched as Hank gathered Barb's bloody body into the car, struggling every moment with half of his left arm missing. "We'll let you go, but don't come back," Matt yelled down at the anarch. Hank only nodded quickly up at the Telemon primogen as he floored the gas pedal and took off across the city. Hank was certain that he would never return to San Francisco.

"So, what now?" Holden asked.

"Now we go pay a visit to the Brotherhood of the Holy Fist," Matt said. "Right after we feed, that is. I'm a little hungry."

"Yeah, it's Miller time," Holden replied with a smile.

"Hey, I know these twins, Sherri and Janice Miller," Carter said over the com. "Their blood is sweet, boys. Let me tell you, I'm all for Miller time."

"Not yet," Matt said. "We just have enough time for a quick bite and a drink, not any fun stuff. We still have a job to do." With that he walked out of the room and down to the Hummer, which he turned toward the Pierce Street Annex. Cameron had given the trio the right to use the Brujah hunting ground that evening in gratitude for Matt's bringing along Carter.

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III

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In the Mission District, the three remaining members of the Brotherhood of the Holy Fist congregated together in their haven to mourn the passing of their brothers. Such was the tradition of the group. After a half-hour of meditation, they all stood up.

"I'm leaving guys, sorry," Wes said as he headed for the door.

"What?" Paul asked incredulously. "We have so much to do, so much to work for. We have to rebuild the Brotherhood."

"No," Wes answered. "**You** have to rebuild the Brotherhood, not **us**". I don't want any more part of all this death. In case you didn't notice, we got the shit kicked out of us last night. I'm not ever doing that again." He walked out the door as Paul stood behind him, unable to find the words that would bring his friend back to him.

"Do not worry," Sisyphus said. "Such is the way of their clan. It is amazing that he stood by us for as long as he did. The Ravnos all need to make their own way in the world."

Paul nodded in response. Sisyphus was right, of course, but it did not make things any easier for the young Brujah _antitribu_ to deal with the harsh reality of the situation.

"Don't worry," came a familiar voice from the back of the room. "Things will get better very quickly."

Paul turned to see the imposing form of their patron standing in the hallway leading to the back door of their haven. On the floor in front of him were two bodies. "Who are they?" Paul asked, gesturing to the two men lying motionless.

"They are the newest members of your Brotherhood," their patron answered. "Bring them both across, now. I want you to embrace both of them, Paul."

"I can't, that would weaken me too much," Paul replied, not wanting to leave himself weakened and vulnerable with there still being the possibility of further Gangrel attack. "I can't embrace more than one childe in a week, anything more is pushing it."

"Sisyphus and I will protect you while you're weakened, but I need these two embraced tonight," the large man demanded, obviously growing more irritated with every passing moment. "Do it! This is an order, Paul. You are not free to deny me this."

"Ok," Paul said, relenting in the face of his patron's insistence. He drained the first of the two, and then gave the new childe some of his own blood. After a few minutes to gather his strength, he repeated the process with the second young man, and then leaned back against the wall, exhausted. He looked up at his patron and smiled, knowing he had done what had been expected.

However, instead of seeing his patron looking down at him with satisfaction, he saw anger. The large form moved quickly towards Sisyphus, and lifted the Nosferatu off the ground by his neck. Paul's mentor lashed out at their patron with all of his strength, but to no avail. Sisyphus was himself one of the older kindred living in the Americas, but he was no match for the large man that was suddenly besetting him. Paul watched as the huge form bit into the throat of the Nosferatu, and drained him of every last drop of blood. He did not stop there, however, and continued to feed until he had absorbed the very life essence that had preserved Sisyphus over the past centuries. When he was done, the patron threw the lifeless husk against the far wall.

"What the hell..." Paul muttered. "You're a diabolist!" He struggled to get to his feet, but was unable to.

"Why does that surprise you?" the larger man questioned. "I've been feeding from your entire group for over fifty years. You are my herd." He looked into Paul's eyes, now so full of shock and fear, and continued. "Of course, I erased your memory of the event every time, but it still occurred. Your blood was far sweeter than that of the Nosferatu, that's why I had you embrace these two." He gestured absently at the newly created kindred at his feet. "Now they will form the core of my new herd."

"New herd? What about me?" Paul asked, beginning to panic.

"You failed me. I wanted to get one of the Brujah to fight the Tremere elder, but you destroyed that for me. You called in the Sons of Cronus to help you, when they should have been left to torch the Pierce Street Annex. That would have completely enraged the Brujah, and then I could have allowed them to find out about the role of the Tremere in everything. Cameron would have sought vengeance, and after Boccaccio extinguished him, Rayce would have come to avenge the death of the Brujah primogen. You messed everything up, and so I sentence you to final death." Within a heartbeat, Paul was held down by his patron, and drained. The large man then picked up the two new childer he would use to repopulate his herd, and slowly walked out.

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IV

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Julian sat at the head of the table, looking at the other primogen briefly before opening the meeting. He had somehow managed to survive yet another crisis with his position as prince intact. For now, he could breathe more easily. "Robert, I believe you have something to say to us?" Julian began.

"Yes," Boccaccio replied. "I will be leaving San Francisco with my childe, Solomon. We will be leaving Patrick behind. He will be our new primogen." At that Robert ceremoniously stood up, and Patrick approached the table from his spot in the corner. Robert shook the hand of his grandchilde, and then left the room. Patrick took the seat of the primogen, knowing that from that point on, for the first time in decades, he was all on his own. When he returned home, he would find that his sire and grandsire had already left.

"We welcome you to our conclave," Julian said once Robert had departed. He silently hoped that he would have an easier time with this younger Tremere, though he doubted it. In that clan, the acorn never fell far from the oak. Decades of training always made certain of that.

"This may be a little presumptuous," Patrick started, "but I was wondering if I could ask for the privilege of creating a childe."

"Who is it?" Julian asked. He knew even as he asked that the question was unnecessary. The Tremere did not choose progeny carelessly. Doubtlessly, the new childe would be responsible and well schooled in the ways of the kindred world. Still, he was curious.

"There is a ghoul we have had in our service for some time. We have determined that he is worthy of entrance into the Tremere clan." Patrick also sensed that the question was a formality, but he answered it politely just the same.

"You have my permission," Julian said. "May you have great success with your childe."

He looked toward the rest of the primogen now. "The problem of the anarchs has been resolved, correct Matt?"

"Yes," Matt answered. "We eliminated all but two of the Sons of Cronus. We allowed the two to escape because they had managed to reach the outside of the building. We were unwilling to risk any mortals that may have happened by. We went to destroy the Brotherhood, but only found two bodies, diablerized. The third survivor was not to be found. We suspect that he diablerized his comrades and took off. There has been no sign of the last one."

"Very good," Julian said. "Now that our city is free from interlopers, we can all concentrate once again on rebuilding our clans in safety."

Across the city, in an abandoned warehouse, sat a large, lone figure. His fingers delicately worked along the keyboard to a laptop computer as he entered some new information. Satisfied that his work was done, he took one last look at the screen before he turned off the computer.

Name: Matthew Reimer File #: 57342

Clan: Telemon (Brujah Bloodline) Location: San Francisco

Embrace: 1995 Last Update: 3-24-98

Sire: Johnny Yashida File #: 54355

Grandsire: Siras Telemon File #: 51246

Displayed Disciplines: Celerity (Telemon), plus fortitude

Rating: 23.6

Notable Victories:

none

Desired Confrontations:

Nosferatu elder

Brujah elder

Satisfied that everything was correct, he turned off the computer and went to work with his two new childer. They would need to learn to hunt well if they were to support not only themselves, but him as well.

Fin

(until next time)

End
file.